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[THE SNAKE IN THE NEST.]

A WINSOME WIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"From Her Own Lips," &c., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TENANTS OF THE "NEST."

Oh, woman, in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made.

"I HAVE had an offer for the Nest, Carita."

"Have you?" and Lady Carita looked languidly up at her brother as if the tidings did not interest her much. She had got over the fit of misanthropy that had come upon her at the beginning of the season and was bright and cheerful, though thin and pale.

Lady Beckenham rejoiced over the means she had taken to rouse her out of her despondency, and prided herself not a little on the fact that some of the most eligible men of the season had laid their hearts and, what was much more to the purpose, their fortunes at the feet of her niece.

No one of them had been accepted. Lady Carita would have none of them, which was very provoking; but it did not matter so much in her case as it would have done if she had been poor. She was well provided for if she never married at all; but such a state of things as that was not to be contemplated for a moment.

The Petronel ladies were never old maids,

they always made eligible matches, and so would Carita when she had thoroughly recovered from the many shocks she had had of late.

"Are you not curious to know who the tenants are?"

Arthur Petronel wondered a little at his sister's apathy. She was fond of the Nest, and had often declared she should like to live there, and she had always taken a great interest in the well-doing of whoever was caretaker there.

"Not very, unless they are people one can visit. I hope there are not a pack of squalling children."

"We should hardly hear their squalls as far as Petronel if there were," he replied. "But set your heart at rest, child; there are no children, and I had the most unexceptionable references in the matter. There will be only two people in the house besides servants—a widow lady and her daughter, or niece. I really forget which."

"And what are their names?"

"The lady who took the house is Mrs. Mansfield; Roxby and Silvester are her solicitors, and gave me all her pedigree. I don't know that I heard the name of the other lady, but she had nothing to do with the taking of the place."

"Then you did not leave the business to Barling?" Lady Carita said.

Barling was her brother's right-hand man in all matters of letting or selling any portion of his property.

"No, I didn't. I knew what a fastidious little sister I had, and I chose to see to it myself. Roxby and Silvester may be depended on, I am sure, and if we find anything we do not like we can decline to relet the place. They have

only taken it for a twelvemonth as it stands, furniture and all."

"And are they there?"

"Yes, by this time. They were coming from somewhere abroad, and wanted to get in directly."

"I hope they will be nice," Lady Carita said. "There are not many nice people about Petronel. Two ladies will be quite an acquisition."

It seemed to stir her up a little, this notion of neighbours at the "Nest," and she looked forward to going to the country with quite a zest. Lady Beckenham was going with them, and there was to be a short time of quiet and rest before they opened their doors to the guests they had invited for the autumn.

"I wonder how the 'Nest' will look, and what the people will be like," she said, as they were on their road home, and Lady Beckenham looked at her eager face in some surprise.

"My dear child, how you harp on the one string!" she said. "What notions have you taken in your head about them?"

"The notion that they will influence our lives in some way. The tenants of the Nest have always brought either good or evil to Petronel, you know."

"You superstitious little goose," her ladyship said. "Petronel cannot be harmed or helped by anyone from that insignificant morsel of a house."

"I don't know," and Lady Carita shuddered. There was an ugly story regarding a lady whose portrait hung on the walls of the old picture gallery, a former Countess of Toronto, who had once been the wife of the owner of the Nest. Report said she had murdered her husband to obtain the doubtful honour of an alliance with

the then master of Petronel, who was about as wicked a man as the light of day ever shone on.

But the tale was mythical to say the least of it, and served no better purpose than a peg for the housekeeper, who was very proud of the place, to hang a fine story upon whenever she had people in to see the pictures, and for the foundation of a very pretty ghost story about the dainty little house, which was said to be haunted at times by the spirit of the ill-used husband.

The earl laughed at the tales that were abroad, declaring that the ghost never was heard except when the wind was making every crevice shriek and every joint crack in the place, and that the spectre, which was never seen, only heard, was the combined production of rats and wind.

Lady Carita did not believe in the legend, she had too much sense, but she shivered a little when the subject was talked of, and would have been very loth to have gone alone to the Nest after nightfall.

"I don't think Arthur or you are either of you likely to be harmed if the people are what they are represented to be," Lady Beckenham went on. "We will call and see them, and if we don't like them we need not go again."

Their way home from the station took them past the Nest, and they all looked curiously at the place to see from the outside what manner of people the inmates might be.

The outside aspect of a place will sometimes give more clue to the tone and character of its inhabitants than even the inside arrangements, and they were all agreeably surprised to see the windows bright and sparkling in the evening sunshine, and the lawn in front a marvel of beauty and dainty colouring.

"They have not spoiled it any way," Lady Carita said, as they lost sight of it. "I am always afraid of people coming and modernising it somehow."

"I should never allow that," her brother said. "Anyone who lives there must keep up the character of the place. I won't have any decorations."

"No. But there is so much they can do without actually painting or whitewashing," Lady Carita said. "They can hang up all sorts of hideous curtains at the windows, and stuff the rooms with horrors unutterable in the way of cushions and antimacassars. The women may have done that for all we could see."

"Women who have taste enough to put up curtains like theirs and drape them in that fashion are not likely to have garish things inside," Lady Beckenham remarked.

And she was right. The new tenants of the Nest were ladies of taste and refinement, and not at all likely to offend the most fastidious person in their way of adorning their house.

Lady Carita would hardly wait for the conventional visiting hour the next day, so eager was she to see what manner of women had come to her favourite nook. Lady Beckenham had a headache—her enemies were wont to say that she found the ailment very convenient whenever she did not want to do anything—and she did not want her niece to rush into friendship with these unknown women. Lady Carita was impulsive, and the very apathy and languor from which she had been suffering made her ready for any new sensation now that she was recovering from it.

Her ladyship really had a headache this morning, a very bad one, born of the hot sun and the journey of yesterday, and she was hardly able to speak to Carita when she came to her bedside and announced that she was going to call on the ladies at the Nest.

"Who is going with you?" she managed to say.

"No one, Aunt Hagar."

"No one?"

"No."

"But you don't know the people."

"Not a bit."

"My dear, you should wait till they—"

"Now, auntie, if I wait till they do anything, I shall never see them. Don't you see it is for

us to begin the acquaintance? It is like a queen going to call on her subjects for me to call on anyone about here. They have to find out that I am not the formidable creature they fancy me. I shall just take the dogs and wander there 'permiscus,' as I heard the coachman say one day apropos of some visit of his own. I will come and tell you what they are like when I come back."

"But, Carita, dear, I think you ought to get Arthur to go with you."

"Arthur's too lazy," retorted the girl, with a smile. "He says he'll hear our report first, and I'm going to make it for both of us."

And stooping down and touching her aunt's face with her lips, she went away and started on her expedition. She made a pretty picture as she walked through the park to the Nest, with the two great dogs by her side, as gentlemanly protectors as half the men of her acquaintance would have been, and the lady who had taken the house looked at her with approving eyes as she came up to the door.

"The young lady from Petronel, I suppose," she said. "I shall like her, I think. I hope she will. It may tend to make her more contented to know such an amiable girl as that one looks. Haigho!"

She sighed as if she had some weary burden to bear, and at the same moment a voice called from an inner room.

"Who is that coming here?" it asked, in a petulant tone.

"I think it is the young lady from the great house yonder—the Earl of Toronto's sister."

"Ah!"

"You will come out and see her?"

"No, I won't. I am not going to be patronised by any earl's sister. You can tell her so if she asks for me. She won't do that, as she does not know of my existence."

"As you please."

The lady sighed again as if she were accustomed to have such speeches made to her, and said no more, and the next moment Lady Carita was ushered into the room.

"I must introduce myself," she said, cordially, but half shyly—she was very fearful of appearing to intrude—"but it rested with me to make the first call. I am—"

"I think I know," the lady replied. "The earl's sister—Lady Carita."

"Yes. And you are Mrs. Mansfield?"

"Yes."

"Then we know each other," Lady Carita said, with a smile, "and I am sure we shall be glad of it, both of us. I was so thankful to hear that nice people had come to this place. It has been empty some time."

She was looking round the room as she spoke and at Mrs. Mansfield herself, and felt as she did so that her brother would never have reason to regret, as far as means and position went, having accepted the lady as his tenant. Everything in the room spoke of refinement and taste, and Mrs. Mansfield herself was dressed as became a lady of means and education.

She looked thoroughly a lady; her dress was of some rich, dark stuff, simple enough in make, but fitting to perfection; but the lace which she wore on her head, in a fashion that admirably became her handsome features, and which also adorned her throat and wrists, was rich and valuable, and looked, moreover, as if it were a part of her daily attire.

"A lady," Carita said to herself. "No make-believe. I wonder what the other one can be like, and what she is to her?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A SURPRISE.

A lady richly clad as she, Beautiful exceedingly.

MRS. MANSFIELD looked at the fair young face before her and sighed a sigh of relief as it seemed.

"I am glad to find anyone like yourself so near me," she said. "I was wondering only

this morning if I might hope for your acquaintance. My niece will be charmed, I am sure. She was objecting to the house on the score of its loneliness before you came, and was rather inclined to see things in a gloomy light. To me it seems a paradise of quiet and loveliness."

"That is my notion of it," Lady Carita said. "But we don't all see alike, do we? Perhaps your niece—"

She stopped with the words on her lips, for there walked into the room as she spoke the very loveliest girl she had ever seen, dressed with a taste and refinement that plainly showed either that she moved in good society or that she had the innate capacity for making the best of herself that belongs to some women from their birth.

There was something curious in the expression of her lustrous eyes that seemed to fascinate Carita as she looked at her. She could not take her eyes off her witching beauty, and it seemed to her as if the new-comer were used to such admiration, and liked it.

"Lady Carita Petronel," Mrs. Mansfield said, quietly, "my niece, Mrs. Stapleton."

"Mrs. Stapleton. Then this fairy vision, for she looked little else, was a married woman! Carita could hardly realise it as she looked at her. The face was the face of a child almost in its innocent purity, and the figure was slim and youthful to a degree. Who was Mrs. Stapleton, and where was he? She caught herself asking the question mentally, remembering that her brother had said that two ladies alone had taken the Nest. Surely this pretty creature could not be a widow.

She collected her scattered wits, for indeed they were somewhat scattered by this wonderful vision, and acknowledged the introduction gracefully, and expressed herself very much pleased to see Mrs. Stapleton, expressing a hope at the same time that the acquaintance thus begun would ripen as time went on.

She did not make a long stay on this first visit, but she gathered from the elder lady—the younger spoke but little—that Mr. Stapleton was nearly always away on business, and she came to the conclusion somehow—how, she could hardly have told—that his lovely wife was not altogether contented with her lot.

She could not tell what had given her the notion, but it was there. There had been something in the exquisite face that spoke of weariness and dissatisfaction, and yet from some word or two that the elder lady let drop she felt sure that everything that woman could wish for was at the petted beauty's command; and that she was the idol of her unseen husband wherever he might be.

"I don't like her," she said to herself. "There is something snake-like in her face, for all its beauty. I wonder what Arthur and Aunt Hagar will think of her? I like Mrs. Mansfield. She seems a nice, straightforward body enough."

Straightforward enough, yes, but oppressed with many cares in the charge of the wilful young lady she called her niece, who was even now giving her a taste of her temper in return for a rebuke anent her behaviour to the Lady Carita Petronel.

"Not civil, wasn't I?" she said, scornfully. "I am not going to trouble myself to be civil to her. I don't want her. I've heard enough about Petronel and the people from it since I came here to last a lifetime; Petronel, it is not a common name. I wonder if they are any relations of—"

"Of whom, my dear?"

"Of someone I met once," was the curt answer. "No one you know, I daresay."

Mrs. Mansfield was used to being answered rudely by this strange woman, and she only shrugged her shoulders and said nothing. Mrs. Stapleton had once told her she was paid for it when she had remonstrated with her on some special piece of rudeness. And it was true, she was paid, and well, for the charge she had undertaken, but it was a very inhuman one sometimes.

"I thought Lady Carita would be a very nice young lady for you to know," she said, after a pause.

And Mrs. Stapleton ceased drumming on the table and looked at her scornfully.

"Why?" she asked.

"Only that she is young and seems amiable, and is likely to be a more pleasant companion for you than I can possibly be. I am glad to find such nice people so near us."

"You needn't be glad for my sake," the girl retorted, insolently. "I don't want to know her. I don't want her here, flaunting her rank and riches in my face. She can't make me her equal, nor give me the right to rule in a house like that, can she?"

She pointed across the park as she spoke to where the towers of Petronel were visible against the horizon, and gave a petulant sigh.

"You don't want to be mistress of such a place, do you?"

"I think I would give my life for it."

"What?"

"Oh, don't stare at me as if I were uttering high treason. I should like to be mistress of Petronel or any other place that carried a coronet with it. I think I would give the rest of my life for one little year of such happiness."

"Don't talk like that, child," Mrs. Mansfield said, her gentle patience giving way before the other's frivolous wickedness. "You are talking treason, the very blackest that a wife can utter. What can you wish for that you have not? There never was a woman so indulged as you are. There never was a wife yet whose every whim was studied as yours has been from the very first. You must be mad, I think to talk as you do."

"Must I? I don't see it. What have I not that a woman can wish for, you ask? Have I a title, riches, a house like that, and pleasures of a London season, and the delights of hearing myself spoken of as the beauty of the hour?"

"No, but—"

"Well, then I should like all that. I should like to be mistress of that house yonder and—"

"Countess of Toronto as well perhaps."

"Just so, if my lord and master were the earl. I'm not quite the heathen you think me, nor am I as heartless as you would like people to fancy me. I don't picture any future for myself that my husband does not enter into. I can assure you."

"I am very glad to know it," Mrs. Mansfield said, quietly, and her charge said no more.

"I wish I had not taken the responsibility," she said to herself, when she was once more left alone. "With all my heart I do. Her husband said she was simple and true, confiding and innocent as a child. He does not know her yet, poor fellow. I am afraid when he does come to know his wife that the knowledge will bring bitterness and sorrow with it. If ever there was a heartless woman in the world she is one."

It was Lady Carita Petronel's opinion also, and Lady Beckenham was somewhat surprised at the account she gave of the lady inmates of the Nest.

"They are widows, auntie," was her answer to the first question put to her by her aunt.

"Widows, my dear?"

"No, not both of them, but the husband of the younger one is almost always away, at least I think that was what they told me. I did not quite understand."

"They seem to have puzzled you somehow."

"They did, and yet—"

"Yet what?"

"They are ladies, anyone can see that at once—at least the elder one is, the other is her niece."

"What were they like?"

For answer Carita described Mrs. Mansfield accurately and declared her liking for her.

"She is a thorough lady, auntie, I am sure," she said.

"And her niece, my dear? Did you say it was her niece?"

"I understood so."

"Did you like her also?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I cannot tell, auntie, it must be a case of Dr. Fell, I think. She is lovely beyond description. I never saw anything like her beauty."

"Ah, these very handsome folks are not always the most agreeable. Was she rude to you?"

"Not rude exactly, repellant rather. I can't get her face out of my head. What do you think she made me think of?"

"I haven't the least idea. The name of your fancies is legion. There's no accounting for them."

"Of Lamia, auntie, Lamia, when she lies in wait for Lycius. I can fancy any man being just as besotted over Mrs. Stapleton as ever he was over the serpent love. There's something unearthly about her loveliness."

"Dear me, I must go and see this Mrs. Stapleton, she must be a most remarkable woman," Lady Beckenham said, with a smile. "Then you did not see her husband?"

"No, he is away."

"Does he exist at all?"

"Whatever do you mean, auntie?" Lady Carita spoke in a tone of alarm. Could she have been countenancing anything improper in visiting these ladies?

"Oh, I don't mean that there's anything wrong about her as far as morals go," Lady Beckenham said, rather amused at her niece's scared face. "But I have been hearing about the ladies since you have been away. Arthur says the prevailing opinion in the neighbourhood seems to be that the young lady is not quite right in her mind. Not violent or mischievous or anything of that sort, but simply requiring attention and supervision, and that she only fancies herself married—no husband has been seen since they came there. Mind I believe this is only servants' hall gossip. I give it to you for what it is worth."

"I don't think it can be true," Carita said, thoughtfully. "I am sure that Mrs. Mansfield spoke of her niece's husband, and that in the most unaffected and natural manner possible. Mrs. Stapleton does not look mad, only wicked."

"We will hear what Arthur says. He is going to call upon them."

"I wish he wouldn't."

"Why?"

"I can't tell, Aunt Hagar. I have had an eerie feeling on me every since I saw that girl's eyes, Mrs. Stapleton's I mean. She is only a girl, not older than I am, if so old. I wish she had never come to the Nest with all my heart."

"My dear child, what a strange notion; you must be ill I think to take such fancies. You need not know those ladies if you don't wish to."

Lady Carita said no more, but she felt uncomfortable, she scarcely knew why, when she saw her brother go out presently and heard from her maid that his man had mentioned he was gone to the Nest.

He turned and waved her a kiss from the path below her window, and his face wore a brighter smile than she had seen on it for some time past.

Petronel was looking its best, and the change from town in the heat and glare of summer was delicious, and Arthur enjoyed it with all his heart.

There was not a lovelier nook in all England than the Herefordshire valley over which the house looked, and the new earl all through his life had been loth to tear himself away from it even when matters of moment called him elsewhere. It had been his father's favourite residence, as it had been his father's before him, and every succeeding master for many generations had done his best to beautify and keep it in repair.

It was home in the truest sense of the word, and Lady Carita little thought what a sense of desolation would presently come over it, and all through the little visit her brother was going to pay to the ladies at the Nest.

CHAPTER IX.

ONCE MORE.

And for the agony and bosom throes
Let it be measured by the wide vast air,
For that is infinite, and so is woe.
Since parted lovers breathe it everywhere.

ARTHUR PETRONEL came back disappointed. The ladies of the Nest were out, and his visit had to be deferred.

"I am sorry I did not see this wonderful Mrs. Stapleton," he said to Carita, when they sat down to dinner.

Lady Beckenham was with them now. Her headache was better, and she was not one of those ladies who make an ailment last an unlimited time. When she was better she was and said so.

"I don't know that she was wonderful," Carita said. "She was very beautiful, and not very glad to see me. I don't want to see her again, she is like a snake."

"Your description makes me all the more anxious to see her," her brother said. "A modern Lamia would be a curiosity."

"That's just what Carita declares she is," Lady Beckenham said, looking up from her soup. "A glorified being with snake's eyes. You must beware, Arthur, when you come near her; all sorts of reports are going about concerning her."

"I think I can take care of myself," the young man said, laughing. "Will you have a stroll after dinner, auntie, down to the Fairy Ring? It will do your head good."

"I should like it, I love that place. Will you come, Carita, it is a lovely night?"

Lady Carita said no. She wanted to finish a book she was reading. The first box from Mudie's would be there in the morning and she wished to send it back.

"I'm tired too, I think," she said. "I will just curl myself up on the sofa while you go, Aunt Hagar, and leave you and Arthur to chat."

"You lazy child," Lady Beckenham said. "Do as you please, yours will be the loss, not ours."

So Lady Carita stayed at home, and her brother and aunt strolled out to the Fairy Ring—a place so named many a long year ago, in the time when people loved to believe in the revels of the little folks and their influence for good or evil on the households within their ken—a lovely little glade, with the moonbeams glinting down into it through the old trees that had stood there since the days when Petronel and its revenues were given by a grateful king to his loyal servant whose life had well nigh paid the forfeit of his brave deeds.

The Petronels had ever been loyal. They had clung to the fortunes of their king, whether good or bad, and the old house that looked down on the valley where the Wye flowed in peaceful laziness now had been the scene of many a sad story of life lost and fortune cheerfully given for the king who ruled the land.

There were Petronels on the walls of the old picture gallery who had fought and died in the wars of the roses, and stately women who had given all they loved for the service of their country. There were faces there of men who had followed the luckless Charles through all his fortunes, and had died in bitter exile for the king they loved and the country they served.

There had been a time of terrible sorrow and dismay at the old place—old even then—when the soldiers of the Commonwealth had sacked the hall and stabled their horses in the chapel and done everything they could to make the memory of the time of England's mingled glory and humiliation remembered till time itself shall be no more.

The treasures of the place were not all lost. Some were buried and some were in the keeping of faithful friends, saved Heaven only knows how, and by-and-bye when better times came round, and some at least of the old families were being reinstated, Petronel held up its head once more.

It came back as a gift from a king who was not

always grateful, and the traces of the presence of the coarse followers of a coarse-minded ruler were in time obliterated.

Since then more wealth had come to the Earls of Toronto through marriages and other sources and many other houses newer and more magnificent than Petronel had become theirs, but there was none they loved like the old place, and none where they stayed so much and invited their friends to so frequently.

There was a romantic legend attached to the fairy ring: Anyone who stayed there on a certain night in the year and observed certain rules and regulations, duly laid down by the old women of the neighbourhood, and said to be of an origin so remote and mysterious that they could only have emanated from the fairies themselves, would see the procession of the fairy queen and her court with whatever changelings her majesty might have condescended to pick up in her progress.

To speak to her or to try and arrest her progress, or to molest her or her court in any way, was, if not present death, something almost as bad, for the fairies never forget or forgive an injury, though they are gentle and helpful to those who pay them proper respect.

"Does it not seem the very place for the 'good peoples' frolics and processions?" Lady Beckenham said, as they seated themselves for a few minutes on a fallen stump, which in itself was one of the most picturesque objects in the dell. "One can understand the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' in such a place as this."

"Yes, it looks just the place for a fairy frolic," Lord Toronto said, dreamily. "You don't mind my cigar, do you?"

"I mind it!" and Lady Beckenham laughed merrily, "as if you and everybody belonging to you had not conspired to smoke-dry me for the last ever so many years. Smoke away, only let me tell you you smoke a great deal too much, dear boy."

"I know."

"Yes, and my telling you is just so much waste of breath. I know all that, but it eases my mind. What did you bring me here for—it wasn't to see the moonlight?"

"You are as good as a witch—it wasn't."

"What then?"

"To talk to you."

"I divined that much—what about?"

"Myself."

"Have you been getting into any scrape?"

"Not that I know of, but I verily believe I am going mad."

"Arthur?"

"Oh, don't look at me in that horrified fashion, I don't want a straight waistcoat at this present moment. But I'm all unbinged. I'm in love, auntie, and that's a fact."

"In love? You?"

"Just so."

"And poor Griselda only dead—"

"Never mind how long she has been dead, Aunt Hagar; if had nothing to do with her, poor soul, it was before she died. But don't misunderstand me. I had resolved with Heaven's help to put the temptation behind me and to be to her all that the marriage service enjoins a man to be to his wife."

"And you would have been, my boy, I know that. But this other love—who is she?"

Lady Beckenham asked the question in fear and trembling. But any dread she might have felt was nothing to the horror which came over her at her nephew's answer. It was not readily given, but as if it were forced out of him.

"A girl I heard singing in the street, Aunt Hagar. Don't faint, it's true."

"Arthur, are you jesting?"

"I am not. It is as true as that you and I are sitting here under the moonlight. She was singing to a parcel of navvies, and sang my heart away. It has never been in my keeping since that hour."

His voice had a far-away tone in it, and his eyes looked as if they were seeing something miles away as he spoke, and Lady Beckenham felt frightened, she really thought he must have suddenly gone out of his senses.

"I don't like to hear you talk like this,

Arthur," she said, quietly. "You did not bring me here to tell me such a wild story as this? You are hiding something from me."

"It was to tell you this and nothing else that I brought you out, auntie," the young man said, with a sad tone in his fresh young voice. "I must speak of it to someone or I shall go as mad as you think me at this minute. Do what I will, strive as I will—and I have striven, Heaven knows, to forget the madness—it has got the better of me. Every hour that I live I seem to think more and more of that fair, sad face, and to feel over again that lithe form resting in my arms. If I do not find her soon I think I shall go crazy in very deed and do some desperate, foolish thing."

"Tell me all about it, Arthur," was Lady Beckenham's grave reply. "You have brooded over this thing till it has assumed the proportions of a love affair. You cannot really love a woman you have only seen once. Did you say you had seen her again?"

"No, I have never seen her since that evening. It does not signify, the destiny is all the same. We shall meet, and she is the only woman in all the world that I should ever care to marry. She must be found."

"To MARRY, Arthur? I can understand your admiration, your infatuation—many a man falls into the same and suffers for it sorely, but to talk of marrying is too absurd. A Petronel does not mate with beggar women."

"She was no beggar, auntie, I found out that much. Warburton got at her story for me."

"Oh, he is a party to this pretty lovemaking, is he?" said the lady, wrathfully. "I should have thought he had more sense."

"Don't blame him, he takes the same view of it as you do. But nothing I can hear from anyone will alter my determination to find that girl if possible and make her my wife. I shall know no rest till it is done."

"Make her Countess of Petronel? Oh, Arthur?"

"Just that, and I have told you that you may not be surprised at anything that happens, that my wife when she comes home may have at least one friend to stand by her. It will come to it, my lady, she will come here Petronel's mistress, my golden-haired darling—for she will be mine some day—I know it, I feel it."

Lady Beckenham did not answer, she was ruminating on the possibility of taking someone else into her counsel, and planning measures to have her nephew locked up if the madness developed itself any more decidedly. None of the Petronels had ever been mad that she knew of, insanity did not run in their family, but her nephew was mad, there could not be a doubt of it.

"Don't talk any more about it to-night," she said, gently but sorrowfully, "give me some time to think over what you have told me. It has been a terrible thing to hear, but I can only hope you will never succeed in your search."

"Why?"

"Because I should fear that if you found a person of that class after a long interval such as you say as elapsed, you would only find her dropped still lower in the social scale. Better she were lost altogether."

"Don't say that, Aunt Hagar, don't," was the reply, spoken in a tone of sharp pain, that showed her how deep his feelings were on the subject. "You have never seen her or you would know how impossible it is to think of her and any impurity in the same thought."

"I think we will go in," was my lady's only reply to this speech.

She felt stricken dumb by his confidence, and had not a word to say.

"And I think we will go in too," said another voice from behind the tree against which they had been sitting, when they were fairly out of sight, and the girl Carita had heard called Mrs. Stapleton rose from the ground where she had been sitting with her aunt by her side, unintentional listeners to all that had passed between Arthur Petronel and his aunt.

"My dear, I should have gone long ago but you would not let me," the elder lady said, looking at her wrist which showed the marks of

where the lithe young fingers had held it like a vice. "I did not want to hear what they said."

"I did. I had a fancy for listening to the earl's outpourings. So that is Lord Toronto, is it? And he would have made a beggar woman his countess. Perhaps he may yet meet her—who knows? And that is Lady Beckenham, his aunt, is it? I think I shall remember that lady if ever I have the pleasure of meeting her in society. Yes, we'll go in, it is getting cold."

Mrs. Mansfield did not quite understand her niece's mood, nor the fiery look that sparkled in her eyes. But she very rarely did understand her, so it did not matter much.

(To be Continued.)

SCIENCE.

STRENGTH OF INSECTS.—At a meeting of the Maryland Academy of Sciences recently Dr. Theobald showed a species of a beetle and gave the following figures: Weight of beetle, 2 grains; weight moved by it, 5½ ounces—2,640 grains, or 1,320 times the weight of the beetle. A man weighing 150 pounds, endowed with the strength of this insect, should therefore be able to move 198,000 pounds, or nearly 100 tons.

ELECTRIC WATCH.—A watchmaker at Copenhagen, by the name of Sonderberg, is reported to have made a watch which requires no winding up, inasmuch as it performs that work itself by means of an electric current. An electric magnet fixed inside the watch keeps the spring perpetually in a state of tension. All that is required to keep the watch going is to preserve the battery in proper working order, for which purpose one or two inspections in a twelvemonth are said to be sufficient.

SOME curious experiments upon the resonance of bells immersed in liquids have lately been described by Mons. Montigny, a Belgian physicist, who procured eleven bells from the chimies of an old clock with which to prosecute his researches. He rang these bells in alcohol, ether, sulphide of carbon and water. In every instance the effect of the liquid was to lower the tone of the bell, so that it gave out a graver sound than when rung in the air. The denser the liquid the more the tone was lowered.

ON many of the railways in Germany the practice of starting locomotive fires with gas instead of wood has been adopted and proves economical. A special apparatus, which costs in Berlin about four pounds, is necessary.

LIFE IN METEORITES.—Dr. Otto Hahn has just published a volume under the title of "Die Meteorite und ihre Organismen," in support of the theory, advanced by Sir William Thompson several years ago, that life probably originated on the earth from seeds brought to it on meteorites from the ruins of another world. Dr. Hahn's work contains a number of illustrations of the microscopic aspect of meteoric stones, and he concludes that meteorites are full of fossil debris of spongiaria and polypes, some of which exist on the earth and others which belong to other planets. M. Meunier, of the French Academy of Sciences, has demonstrated that the figures in question are merely clustering crystals of eulatite; in fact, M. Meunier has successfully created the zoophites in his laboratory.

SUGAR FROM RAGS.—Some years ago Mr. Pepper created some sensation by undertaking to make sugar from old shirts. Sugar is now manufactured in Germany from old rags. The rags are treated by sulphuric acid and converted into dextrine; this is treated with a milk of lime, and is then subjected to a new bath of sulphuric acid, which converts it into glucose. The glucose obtained by this process is identical with that of commerce, and may be used in the same way for confections, ices, etc. When the manufacture has become more abundant the price will doubtless be very small. It is known that a large number of substances are capable of transformation into glucose. The cellulose of fibrous tissue of wood, treated with sulphuric acid, is changed into dextrine and glucose, and glucose is industrially produced from starch.



[CONVALESCENT.]

A BURIED SIN; OR, HAUNTED LIVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Kate Branksome's Foe," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight?

It is the evening of Lady Dunraven's arrival, and she is adorning herself, or rather her maid is adorning her, for conquest.

An old campaigner is she, an Amazon who has for years waged successful war against mankind; a female brave who has trodden the war path of many London seasons, returning scathless, with masculine scalps at her girdle. And although she has been sadly worsted in recent encounters with her last and greatest foe, she does not despair of ultimate victory.

Worth, the great armorer, has equipped her magnificently. Well she knows the value of the weapons with which he has furnished her. As she stands before a pier-glass, and scans her armour with anxious care, she smiles with pleasure at the reflection of her own loveliness.

St. John Darrell, emerging from his dressing-room and encountering her in the gallery, smiles also, with kindly cynicism. He knows what a triumph of high art is that ravishing costume, and that a woman who dons it for a dinner en famille has some special object to serve; he imagines the object is to eclipse Blanche and Lady Clare.

Nevertheless, he rejoices in the effect with the same cold, artistic appreciation with which he would rejoice in a chef d'œuvre of sculpture

or of painting; and as they go down the broad stairs, he pelts her with gay, complimentary witticisms.

"As handsome, as well matched, as radiantly joyous a couple as could be found within fifty leagues," thinks Blanche Carew, as they enter the drawing-room.

And at the thought her heart sinks in an uncalled-for manner, at which she vaguely wonders.

"I have not invited anybody to meet you this first evening. I thought old and tried friends like yourself and Mr. Darrell might find each other's society sufficient."

Lady Dunraven hardly believes her own ears, hardly credits her own sight. The speaker is Mrs. Carew, and that human icicle's tones are actually cordial. She beams with a frosty smile upon the two people she most dislikes, and is openly sanctioning a relationship in which she has hitherto found grounds for righteous reprobation.

Upon Blanche Carew, vaguely wondering at the sinking of her heart, there falls a ray of light. This beautiful woman of fashion, this Lady Dunraven, possesses the distinction she herself has unwittingly coveted—that of being St. John Darrell's friend.

They go in to dinner, and Blanche takes the place assigned to her, upon the earl's right hand, and responds gratefully to the kindness of his manner. He has been very good, she thinks, humbly, from the very day she and her mother took up their abode at Preston Castle, perhaps she has accepted his goodness too much as a matter of course.

Great as is the difference between their ages, she has never felt that it raised a barrier between them in the matter of perfect confidence. They have thoroughly understood each other, this wicked old nobleman who turned, for his children's sake, from the error of his ways, and this pure young girl who had no error from which to turn.

He has been pleased to have her with him; he has opened his mind freely to her concerning

his many fears and perplexities; he has sought and acted upon her advice; and this homage of age to youth has pleased and flattered her. They are true friends in their way, just as Lady Dunraven and St. John Darrell are friends in theirs; why can she not be content?

So she reasons, convicting herself of ingratitude, trying hard to be interested in my lord's ponderous pleasantries. Meanwhile, she toys with the food upon her plate, feeling as though it would choke her, whilst strained ears drink in the lightest utterance of the woman who enjoys her supreme good. As she listens her depression deepens; she acknowledges that between Lady Dunraven and herself there can be no rivalry.

For the talk is of the people who compose what is called London society. The choicest tit-bits of scandal, the latest gossip of the clubs, the last nine days' wonder of high life. And the topics are discussed gaily, mockingly, as though blasted reputations, embittered lives, poverty, misery, sin, were only themes for light laughter and careless jest, for the fashionable lady's shafts of venomous sarcasm and the fashionable cynic's unconcerned though not unkindly scorn.

Blanche Carew, with her earnestness, her deep convictions of right and wrong, her inner religious life, could only extract, not amusement, but sadness, from the subjects they handle with such zest.

Conversation becomes more general. It touches on the state of Ireland, and everybody laughs at Lord Ferrars's fierce denunciation of agitators, his rough-and-ready suggestions for tranquillising the Emerald Isle. It discusses the fate of the Sea Nymph, a steamer which is supposed to have been run into and sunk in mid ocean with all hands. It embraces our foreign policy, and all the newspaper topics of the day.

Lady Dunraven is well versed in them, and talks easily, brilliantly, fearlessly. St. John Darrell is evidently enjoying an intellectual treat. Blanche again acknowledges that there

can be no rivalry between herself and Lady Dunraven.

For she—Blanche—can only admire, she could not emulate, the glancing wit, the happy turns of expression, the tone which implies a serene and lofty stand of observation, from which the struggles and sorrows of mankind are regarded with interest or indifference, as one regards the progress of a comedy upon the stage, without personal feeling of any kind.

She, too, could speak upon these themes, but it must be pitifully, sympathetically, earnestly. Sometimes, forgetting her shyness, and knowing that his gentle cynicism would not rebuff or hurt her, she has talked to St. John Darrell, and he has listened patiently, smiling at her childish enthusiasm. She comprehends now how foolish and un congenial her simplicity must have been to the man of the world, and her heart aches with jealous pain.

Yet she wonders whether, if it were possible for her to take Lady Dunraven's place, she would be altogether satisfied. Do these fashionable people do more than amuse each other? What is there behind their smiling, polished calm? The one has a husband, whom society says she does not love; the other has a wife, of whom society knows nothing. Do they ever, when no one is near to witness, lay their masks aside, and looking each upon the other's hidden grief, take sweet counsel together and rise up comforted? Or are they hypocrites to each other, as to all the world beside?

Dinner is over, and Mrs. Carew gives the signal for retreat; Blanche is glad to get away. St. John Darrell, opening the door, pursues Lady Dunraven with a jest, but for Blanche he has neither word nor look. The girl feels the omission acutely; a choking sense of injustice troubles her.

Is it her fault, she is asking, that she discovered a secret he desired to hide? How has she forfeited the kindness his manner towards her used to express? Why has he been so distant and hard since they walked home through the woods, and his life-sorrow suddenly confronted them in the park? Does he know that she is breaking her heart with pity for him, and does his proud spirit resent the fact as though it were an injury?

The great drawing-room opens at one end into a conservatory, at the other into the music-room. There has been some talk of a concert the Reverend Felix Pendexter is trying to organise for the benefit of his organ fund, and Blanche has a pet project which seems to be approaching realisation.

My lord of Malbreeke has no mean violinist, although he hid his light under a bushel pretty persistently until Mrs. Carew's advent. Since then he and Blanche have practised together for many a long, pleasant hour.

If he could be induced to join her in an instrumental duet the pecuniary success of Mr. Pendexter's concert would be assured, for the British public will cheerfully pay its crowns to hear a real earl fiddle, let him fiddle never so badly.

She passes into the music-room, ostensibly to look out the pieces they are presently to try, really to be alone with this strange new pain which possesses her.

Mrs. Trollope follows, ostensibly to listen, really to enjoy forty winks of oblivion. Mrs. Carew and Lady Dunraven are left together for the first time since the latter's arrival, and each becomes suddenly conscious of an impending explanation.

"I hardly expected so kind a welcome as you have given me, Mrs. Carew," says the younger, with silken smoothness of accent.

Then those two women of the world look straight into each other's eyes like skilled swordsmen about to fence.

"You would be sure of a welcome, upon your merits," answers Mrs. Carew, with cold graciousness. "Just now I am doubly glad to see you. The society a man like Mr. Darrell needs can hardly be supplied by an old woman and two young girls, nor is his companionship—I say

this in all confidence—the most desirable for the latter."

Lady Dunraven's eyes brighten. She begins to understand; but the understanding only confirms a foregone conclusion, and she is clever enough to foresee the advantage of an explicit alliance, offensive and defensive.

"Young girls generally consider Mr. Darrell a most agreeable man," she says, innocently.

"I am afraid so," replies Mrs. Carew, gravely. "A girl's fancy is easily caught, and I should never forgive myself, Lady Dunraven, if I allowed Clara to be thrown too much into a 'detrimental' society. Not that I exactly fear such a contingency, but you can understand—"

"Your almost maternal anxiety," adds the other, with a word-thrust swift and sharp as a stroke of lightning. She sees that the thrust goes home and turns her head aside to conceal the fierce jealousy which sweeps over her features. Blanche Carew is then a rival.

"Exactly," assents Mrs. Carew. "I am careful for Clara as I should be for Blanche, and for Blanche as I am for Clara."

"Has Mr. Darrell evinced a partiality for either?"

She tries hard, so hard, to ask the question unconcernedly, but despite herself her voice trembles a little. Each of those two skilled fencers has found the other vulnerable.

"I think not—I am sure not. It is not likely that he will do so now. The charms of two school-girls cannot attract much, contrasted with your own."

"You flatter me," replies Lady Dunraven, and it is noticeable that her voice does not tremble now; it has grown curiously distinct and hard. "The quiet friendship of a married woman, Mrs. Carew, has not the alluring power of a girl's young love. And St. John Darrell is not exactly a 'detrimental.' If he and Blanche should like each other I daresay the earl—"

"The earl has other views," interposes Mrs. Carew, mysteriously. "I think I may safely trust you with a secret."

"I daresay we shall keep each other's counsel," is the careless retort, and the elder woman winces at its directness.

"Then I will tell you in the strictest confidence that the earl hopes Ferrars may marry Blanche. When he first mentioned the plan to me I opposed it firmly, both on the score of Ferrars's youth and on that of his wildness. But youth is a fault which mends all too quickly—wildness is not vice. Mr. Howard's influence is gradually, I trust, effecting a reform, and the earl says the love of such a girl as Blanche might save his son. Now, Lady Dunraven, I have trusted you as I have trusted no other person. You know my most secret thoughts."

"I think I do; we can rely upon each other," is the reply, and again Mrs. Carew winces at the tone.

Meanwhile my lord of Malbreeke and St. John Darrell have chatted quietly over their wine. Ferrars has slipped away to sit with Mostyn Howard, and the earl looks after him hopefully.

"The lad is improving, Malbreeke has."

"Thanks to Mr. Howard," replies my lord. "Do you know, Darrell, I believe the young cub is beginning to think there is not his tutor's fellow upon the face of the earth. What do you think he was doing when I went into Mostyn's room to-day?"

"Standing on his head?"

"No, reading history aloud, as though he enjoyed it. I think he was ashamed at being caught—"

"Do good by stealth and blush to find it fame," murmurs St. John, meditatively.

"He explained that Howard's eyes were weak and that he, Ferrars, had to assist in collecting the materials required for that wonderful historical novel the tutor is writing."

"Ferrars will be a credit to you yet," comments Darrell; and then the two men talk disjointedly, until the younger rises from the table.

"Stop one instant," says the earl, hurriedly.

"I want to ask you a question, Darrell. You may, perhaps, deem it an odd one."

St. John gives one swift, keen glance at his kinsman's face, and reads in it unwonted perturbation.

"What is it?" he says, quietly. "You will not think me officious or—impertinently curious?"

"Certainly not."

"Have you any thought of marrying Blanche Carew?"

"Why do you ask? What made you imagine such a thing?" inquires Darrell, slowly.

The earl is unsteadily pouring out a glass of claret, and in doing so he has spilled a few drops of the dark liquor upon the cloth.

"I have sometimes thought your manner to be a little marked. Well, not marked, you know—but different—can't you understand?" says my lord, incoherently.

"The thing is utterly impossible. Such an idea has never for one moment been entertained by me, and I am convinced it has never for one moment occurred to her," answers St. John, with thoughtful deliberation.

He is asking himself whether he has indeed betrayed himself, and he is resolving that neither by incautious word nor look will he in future risk a disclosure which could only pain the gentle spirit of the girl he loves. Never again must he forget the gulf which separates them; never again must he permit himself such happiness as he enjoyed when they walked together from the toy church through the Preston woods.

"I am glad," says my lord, cheerily. "I wonder whether the child has picked out those duets yet. Let us go and see."

Blanche is still in the music-room, improvising dreamily, seated at her harp. She sees the gentlemen enter, marks how Darrell's cold glance falls on her, and wanders hastily in search of the beautiful and majestic woman who claims him for her special friend. She sees him making straight for the conservatory, where Lady Dunraven's superb figure is dimly visible, and the girl's white fingers, straying among the strings, evoke two or three rich, low notes in a minor key, which are not notes but sobs.

Then the earl crosses the threshold of the music-room, marches towards her, takes the little cold fingers between his own.

"My dear," he says, and so kind is his tone it seems to comfort and cheer her aching heart. "My dear, you shall do as you will with me. I will play at Pendexter's concert if you wish it, only we must have many long practices together lest I break down."

Then Blanche, plucking up courage, answers merrily that they will practise for fifteen hours a day, and soon gay dance-music of harp and violin proclaims that the first rehearsal has begun.

St. John Darrell and Lady Dunraven listen to it, sitting very near each other, amongst bamboo stems and luxuriant tropical grasses, inhaling the faint exotic fragrance, saying little, but thinking, maybe, all the more; until the spell is broken by the lady's shrill scream. She is trembling violently, and looks frightened out of her wits.

"What is it?" says St. John.

"A face at the window, just there," she replies, pointing with an unsteady finger. "Such an ugly face, pressed against the glass, with the nose all flattened and white. Pray, pray, do not go out, perhaps somebody may shoot you."

"Nonsense!" he says, disengaging the trembling hands, for in her agitation she is clinging to him far more closely than the occasion demands, and the cynic is not quite sure the alarm is not feigned and the face at the window a phantom of Lady Dunraven's imagination. "Nonsense. If any fellow is hanging about, I should like to ask what he wants."

He opens a French window and steps out upon the lawn. The night is sufficiently starlit to reveal all objects within a hundred yards or so and a human form is not amongst them.

"A conservatory is the correct spot for a 'plant,'" he thinks, with sardonic appreciation of

his own pun; and with that he returns to soothe his fair companion as courteously as though he had no doubts concerning the genuineness of her alarm.

He has no faith in the face at the window. He does not know that a strangely attired old gentleman, with a butterfly net on his shoulder, hurrying through the semi-darkness, turns occasionally to shake his fist at the lighted windows of Freeston Castle.

"The jade!" cries the old gentleman, savagely. "I swear I will write to the lawyers to-morrow. Oh, the accursed jade!"

CHAPTER XXV.

BURNING THE HATCHET.

Happy but when we seek to endure

A little pain, then find a cure

By double joy requited.

For friendship like a severed bone,

Improves and gains a stronger tone

When aply reunited.

SUPPORTED by his pupil's strong arm, Mostyn Howard creeps from his own rooms to those below. Weak as a child still, because of the excessive hemorrhage from his wound, he has been pronounced convalescent and is on the high road to recovery.

It chafes that as pupil and tutor are making, by easy stages, a cautious descent, they encounter a lady at whom Mostyn glances with a feeling of semi-recognition, such as comes to us sometimes when we look into a strange face and wonder whether we have seen it before, in a dream, or in that former existence, millions of years ago, through which some French philosopher asserts we have all passed.

She is simply a plain old woman, very sour of visage, very prim of manner, who draws aside to let them pass.

"It is Mrs. Trollope, and a crabbed old wretch she is," says Lord Ferrars, in response to a careless interrogation, and Mostyn Howard, who has heard sundry anecdotes concerning Lady Dunraven's duenna, forgets forthwith that for the moment he fancied he knew the face.

But Mrs. Trollope stares after him, so long as he remains visible, with an air of puzzled bewilderment, and mutters incoherent ejaculations of astonishment all the way to her own rooms.

Mostyn has held quite a levée, seated in the most comfortable arm-chair the castle contains, and propped up with pillows in a truly scientific fashion.

Mrs. Carew and Blanche, Lady Dunraven and St. John Darrell, the earl and Ferrars, have visited him. They took their several turns, for the doctor has forbidden noisy talking and undue excitement.

There is only one member of the family who has failed to testify the lively gratitude they owe to him who purchased Lord Ferrars's life almost at the cost of his own.

Strange to say, he feels the omission keenly, perhaps because invalids are prone to harp upon grievances, imaginary or otherwise. It is only Lady Clare, wilful, capricious, ungracious Clare, who has failed to say, "How do you do?" and to congratulate him upon the preservation of his worthless life. Yet, oddly enough, he takes the omission to heart, and grieves about it (in his physical weakness) like a vexed child.

Leaning back with closed eyes in the luxurious chair, red pillows propping his weary head, and bringing out in striking contrast the wan hue of illness, he looks indeed an object of compassion.

Somebody thinks, so, as she noiselessly opens the door and enters, bearing a tray on which is set a lilliputian tea equipage with conestibles to match. Somebody pauses a moment, unable fully to note the changes in his pale face, because her vision has grown dim. Then, turning away, she arranges the tray upon a little table with slow and unnecessary exactness, lest he should discern the dimness and the reason thereof.

"Lady Clare!"

"A votre service, monsieur," cries the girl, gaily, almost defiantly.

"I thought you were still bearing malice and hatred in your heart, and would not come to see me."

"On the contrary, sir, I deferred the pleasure till now, that I might better make the amende honorable by pouring out your tea and waiting upon you hand and foot."

"A lowly office, for an earl's daughter," says Mostyn, musingly.

"Is any office lowly when a woman performs it for the man she delights to honour?" is the merry rejoinder, with a supple of earnestness in its mirth.

Mostyn leans back, pondering the question and that which it implies.

"Woman!" he repeats, with a quizzical emphasis; and his sunken eyes light up with their old fire.

It is so pleasant to be taking up his intimacy with this spoiled child, not where he left it the night he was shot, but where he left it that day he saved her from the angry bull and made of himself a beast of burden in the Freeston woods.

Such a child she looks now, pointing because he denies her womanhood, shaking a little teaspoon at him playfully, threatening him with starvation and thirst if he does not at once admit her claims to the honours of maturity. He affects to be grievously alarmed at this show of force, and concedes everything she desires, whereupon she pardons him and graciously supplies his needs.

He thinks he never tasted tea so delicious as that she pours into the lilliputian cups, each of which holds about a thimbleful. He thinks he never ate cake so spongy and light as that she hands him upon a plate about as broad as the palm of his hand.

They were merry over the voraciousness of his appetite, and he pretends to fear that having failed, thus far, to rid herself of her foe, she is trying to kill him with kindness.

"Nay, I do not war with crippled invalids," she replies. "I have buried the hatchet for the present."

"And afterwards?" he queries. "When I get well and strong you will dig it up again, Lady Clare?"

She does not answer, she only turns her face away, that he may not see the compunction and the shame which are written upon it. He misconstrues the gesture, and a shadow seems to fall upon him, blotting out the joyousness of a tacit reconciliation. When he speaks again it is with that sad humility which tells of pride subdued.

"It is not for me, Lady Clare, to dictate how you shall order yourself towards your brother's tutor. If I revert to the past you will understand it is not to criticize but to plead."

Still she does not answer. The silence, the averted face have a lying eloquence of their own in his then mood. The pathos of his next words is nearly kin to despair.

"I would not plead for myself. Mine is a haunted life, in which the spectre of a buried sin points ever to shadowy retribution. Beside the familiar sorrow which daily confronts me a girl's caprice, a girl's injustice would be a minor trouble, dwarfed to insignificance, did it not hinder the work of expiation. I would fain do some good in the world, before pursuing Nemesis overtakes me."

He pauses once more, and sighs wearily. There is no change in her attitude, save that the proud head droops a little.

"I have set myself to save your brother from almost certain ruin, and to make of him a manly, upright, honourable English gentleman. I should have won his confidence—perhaps even his affection—long ere this had not your influence been persistently exerted against me. For Ferrars's sake, Lady Clare, let there be peace between us until my work is done."

The feeble, sorrowful voice is still—the pleading is at an end. Slowly Clare's bowed head is lifted, slowly she turns towards him a penitent, tear-stained face. He knows now that her

silence was not that of supineness but of emotion.

"Mr. Howard," she cries, vehemently. "I have been a—a little beast!"

And with that she falls to crying and laughing hysterically, in one breath, like the baby that she is. By degrees she succeeds in confessing all her "wickedness" as she calls it, and in telling him of that agony of remorse she felt when she believed that he had given his life for her brother, and that it was she, his enemy, who had sent him to his death. Only of the dream which preceded and intensified the remorse she says nothing. It was only a dream—perhaps she has forgotten.

"Say that we are not enemies now—say that you forgive me," she implores, with hands clasped in humble entreaty.

And Mostyn Howard, with shining eyes and a wan face which looks ridiculously happy when one bears in mind (to use his own words) "the familiar sorrow which daily confronts him," assures her with quite unnecessary earnestness that he had never anything to forgive.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A VILLAGE CONCERT.

The soul of music slumbers in the shell,
Till waked and kindled by the master's spell;
And feeling hearts, touch them but rightly, pour
A thousand melodies unheard before.

FREESTON is only a little village, but it boasts an immenseschool-room, built by the generosity of a former earl who had no notion of doing things by halves—a schoolroom, in fact, large enough to contain the entire population of the parish; although it was erected before board schools came into fashion, or the English middle class began to be taxed to enable their workpeople's children to compete with their own in the glutted labour market.

At the top of the school-room a temporary platform has been constructed by placing boards upon trestles, the unsightly supports being screened by hired hangings of crimson cloth. All the benches with backs to them, all the chairs in the neighbourhood which could be begged, borrowed, or chartered for the occasion, have been brought to the fore for the accommodation of bloated aristocrats who do not mind paying five-shilling pieces to hear a nobleman discourse sweet (third-rate) music for the benefit of the Reverend Felix Pendexter's organ fund.

Humble folk, who purchase the same privilege at an inferior price, must be content to sit with aching bodies upon hard, narrow forms, or even to find standing room in the doorway. But they will endure the inconvenience cheerfully; aping the stoicism of their betters, with precisely the same British snobishness (in its degree) as that which leads the elite of the neighbourhood to change their dinner hours and drive miles to be asphyxiated in a stifling room lest they should fail to pay an acceptable compliment to Harold Darrell, tenth Earl of Malbreckthane.

This is the earl—a man with grey hair and wrinkled visage, tall and squarely stout of build, ruddy of face and rugged of feature, carrying in one hand a violin and in the other its bow, and looking as though a crowbar and a pickaxe would be fitter implements for his massive strength to wield.

Still there is about him a certain dignity and authoritativeness of presence; the air of grand seigneur which he lacked in his hot, rough youth, but which comes slowly but surely to the veriest lout whom men have approached but in hand for fifty years, and who has received in almost every assembly the deference which salutes him as its chief.

He looks every inch a gentleman, as with ceremonious, old-fashioned courtesy he leads Blanche Carew to her harp, and slightly inclines his head to an audience more enthusiastically cordial in its reception than it would permit itself to be to a musician of tenfold talent, were he a musician only.

Sweet Blanche Carew! There is brave blood in her veins which will assert itself presently, but

just at this instant her cheeks are blanched with a débutante's timidity. She has stolen one glance at the applauding mob, and the rows of heads frighten her.

The earl picks up a glove she has dropped in her confusion, and returns it with a kind speech of encouragement, for which she thanks him with a grateful smile.

Lady Dunraven, seated amongst other great people in the second row, comments upon the incident, sotto voce, to her left-hand neighbour, a notorious gossip. She does not imagine that St. John Darrell—who has taken, at her request, the chair upon her right—can overhear through the uproar which is meant for encouragement a word of that biting, spiteful slander, but the cynic's ears are sharp.

The gossip pricks up her ears and interrogates with eagerness, and at the whispered colloquy St. John's ordinarily smooth brow grows black as night.

He is staring fixedly at Blanche Carew, and there is magnetism in the look, for her downcast gaze is slowly uplifted till it meets his own. Then timidity vanishes. She ceases to fear the audience—she thinks only of that dark face which glowers upon her so fiercely. She could almost wait out before the crowd her startled wonderment.

He has tacitly refused her friendship, not merely preferring that of another, but showing plainly that to him Lady Dunraven's regard is all in all. This she could bear; day by day, with forced resignation, she has repeated to herself that this she could bear. But what means the anger in his face? How has she offended him? Having refused to be her friend, has he determined to become her foe?

There is no time to torment herself with such useless queries, the applause is lulled—it is time to begin. With the first low, liquid notes of her instrument she forgets even St. John Darrell's anger. A true musician is Blanche Carew.

Tumultuous applause, the stamping of many feet, the clapping of many pairs of hands. She has passed through the ordeal, and the audience is satisfied.

Fashionable occupants of the front benches are interchanging complimentary criticisms; some of them, as the earl hands her to a seat, distort their faces to indicate ecstatic delight. St. John Darrell, to whom one lady protests that she never heard music more ravishingly effective, rejoins unsympathetically it is certainly about as excellent as that produced by the average street musician on whom she bestows her sixpences.

He is in bitter mood to-night. It seems to him that only Lord Ferrars is bestowing honest laudation. The lad has declined chairs and benches, and has insisted on seating himself on a low box at the extreme end of the temporary platform. His long legs are stretched to their fullest extent, his left hand plays with the folds of crimson cloth which conceal the wooden trestles, his right guards with extraordinary care a crush hat which lies upon his knees. Ever since he secured this most uncomfortable seat his countenance has beamed with mischievous enjoyment, and the ovation he bestows is as hearty as the due guarding of the crush hat will permit.

The concert drags its slow length along, and the end of the first half is approaching. In either half, according to the programme, there is to be an instrumental duet of harp and violin—also, in either half, a song by Miss Carew.

The time has arrived for Blanche to sing. She has chosen a simple little ballad with a plaintive minor accompaniment, and the theme of it is the estrangement of friends. With the first notes of her magnificent contralto voice an intense stillness falls upon the people in that crowded school-room.

They feel, keenly or dimly, as Nature may have blessed them with ears for music, the pleasure derivable from the clear tones of a sweet, strong singer; but above and beyond this calm appreciation there is something more induced by the union, as it were, of histrionic power with that of the vocalist.

It can hardly be explained, this wondrous ability possessed by one in a hundred thousand—to charge the voice with so much passion and so much pain that the words of a simple ballad go straight to the innermost recesses of the most worldly heart.

Blanche Carew possesses it, and her song thrills and moves the audience to real delight—real feeling. One man, sitting there with a dark, impassive face, is stirred likewise; but he makes no sign. He knows his own weakness now, and he dares not reveal it to her, though she may think him estranged and hard, and may sing to him until the sound of her voice is agony. He loves her too well.

Again the storm of plaudits breaks forth, and this time they are wholly genuine. Only Ferrars fails to stamp and clap. His fingers are busy under his crush hat, and a sound issues from it (although no one but himself can hear it for the noise) like to the striking of a match. Dexterously he parts the folds of crimson cloth, and, unobserved, throws something from him amongst the wooden trestles.

Then, indeed, he drops the crush hat to the floor and makes up for former abstinence by stamping and clapping like a maniac and shouting "Encore" vociferously.

The "Encore" is responded to by a repetition of the last verse of the ballad, and a second though more subdued ovation follows. Then the Reverend Felix Pendexter appears bowing, and salutes the audience with a sneeze.

The Reverend Felix Pendexter is the proud possessor of a thin tenor voice, and he has selected a sentimental love-song wherewith to enrapture the patrons of his concert. It is unfortunate for the success of the love-song that his tendency to sneeze increases, and the occupants of the front benches seem to be afflicted with a similar one.

Lord Ferrars appears to be enjoying the fun in paroxysms of silent laughter.

In truth a very pungent aromatic odour is gradually filling the room. Also, through the crevices of the platform, and between the folds of the crimson hangings, thin fumes of smoke are ascending. In the middle of his song the Reverend Felix sneezes once more and stops, lively alarm depicted upon his otherwise unexpressive features. Hastily he descends from a platform which is swiftly becoming enveloped in smoke-wreaths, and stoops to peer between crimson folds into the cavernous recess, but at that instant, under his reverend nose, a cracker explodes with a noise suggestive of a concentrated Fifth of November, and he starts backward with such unseemly precipitation that, catching his foot against some obstacle, he quite loses his equilibrium, and seats himself with painful violence upon Mrs. Trollope's knees.

Bang! bang! bang! Under the platform crackers are exploding. The ladies in the front seats are screaming with real or affected terror; the people behind are clambering to the top of the forms, and trying to discover above each other's heads the cause of the tumult.

In the midst of the confusion, when the noise is at its loudest, there rises at the full pitch of vigorous, youthful lungs a shout of "Fire!"

(To be Continued.)

OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS.

DISCOVERY OF MADEIRA.—In the year 1344, in the reign of Don Pedro the Fourth, the island of Madeira was discovered. The island, till then known only to savage barbarians, and afterwards colonised by fugitive Venetians, had been visited occasionally by Moorish pirates or surprised by the rude boats of barbarian fugitives. In the latter part of the fourteenth century, however, this island has supplied corn, wine and oil—viands alike for the necessitous and the luxurious. The Spaniards conquered the island. The

bounty of Nature, our common dame, did the rest. Madeira, once a deserted isle, is now one of the most promising portions of the few remaining possessions of the regal diadem of Spain, Aragon and Castile. Such is the growth of a few centuries; such is the growth or the development of land under proper cultivation. Malta, without cultivation, becomes a desert; Madeira supplies her grape slopes and her wine vintage for half the connoisseurs of the universe.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.—In 1815 died Robert Southey, poet laureate. He had occupied the office after Wordsworth. After Southey came Tennyson. Such is the singular flight of time. Southey dies; Wordsworth too is near him. Tennyson is now one of our best poets, though we should be reluctant to assign to him the laurel bay of Wordsworth or even of Southey. But that lake county produced remarkable men of its kind—as Wilson, Wordsworth and De Quincey; to forget them is not possible. Southey had a little quiet nest for them all in his little circle of beautiful seclusion at the lakes—namely, Greta Hall, in the county of Westmoreland, just below the near point of junction of the Greta and the Tees. This is a piece of the biography of our border poets.

HORACE WALPOLE ON BALLOONS.—On March 2, 1784, Horace Blanchard, the alchemist, made his first ascent by means of a hydrogen balloon. This was the first of the really practical ascents; the next when Marshal Pichegru, at the battle of Fleurus, used the strategy of a balloon as the means of observing the strength of the Austrian army. This was in 1798.

LOVE AND TIME.—The following neat epigram was written in a fair lady's album. Any ardent youths may be reminded that the verse will correctly allow of any name of two syllables—i.e., Mary, Annie, Alice, Ethel, and the like. Here it is:

"Tell me," said Laura, "what can be
The difference 'twixt a clock and me?"
"Laura," said I, "Heaven prompts the
powers
To do the task you set them.
The clock reminds me of the hours,
And you make me forget them!"

THE KYRLE SOCIETY.—Readers of the newspapers have lately been entertained with accounts of the doings of the Kyrle Society—composed of "Kyrly swells," who seek to introduce pre-Raphaelitism and its fantastic oddities among the poor and destitute, forgetting, it should seem, the pertinent question "If a man ask for bread, will ye give him a stone?" It is really rather too bad to call such an amateur affair after the name of John Kyrle—whose praises have been celebrated in immortal verse by Pope. This praise of "the man of Ross," as Dr. Johnson remarks, deserves particular examination. He is said to have diffused blessings innumerable from five hundred pounds a year. Kyrle died in 1724, in the 82nd or, according to other accounts, in the 90th year of his age. He is said to have reserved only fifty pounds a year for his own particular use out of his annual income, devoting the rest entirely to the purposes of philanthropy.

EPIGRAM ON A PEN.—Philemond Holland, a physician of Coventry, translated Pliny's Natural History with one pen, as he says himself in these lines:

"With one sole pen I wrote this book,
Made of a gray goose quill;
A pen it was when I took,
A pen I leave it still."

THE SIGN OF THE THUMB.—In the middle ages the thumb pressed on the wax was recognised as a seal to the most important documents, and secretaries detected in forging or falsifying documents were condemned to have their thumbs cut off. Ducange gives an account of a certain northern princess who had entered a convent and become a nun. Subsequently circumstances occurred which rendered it an important point of policy that she should be married, and a dispensation was obtained from Rome, abrogating her conventual vow, for that purpose. The lady, however, obstinately refused

to leave her convent and marry the husband which state policy had provided for her, so arrangements were made for marrying her by force. But the nun, placing her right thumb on the blade of a sword, swore that she would never marry, and as an oath of this solemn character could not be broken she was allowed to remain in her convent. Licking of the thumb is a most ancient form of giving a solemn pledge or promise, and has (according to a passage in Erskine's Institutes) remained to a late period in Scotland as actually a legalised form of making a bargain. This custom, though now apparently credulous and childish, bears indubitable marks of great antiquity.

MAUNDY THURSDAY.—Maundy Thursday is always the Thursday before Easter. Its name has occasioned some trouble to antiquaries. One writer conceives "maundy" to be corrupted from the "mandates" given on that day to the disciples. Perhaps with better reason it is conceived to be derived from the Saxon or Old English word "maund," a name for a basket, and subsequently for any gift or offering contained in the basket. Thus Shakespeare uses the word when he says, "A thousand favours from her maund she drew;" thus Hall, in his "Satires," speaks of "a maund charged with household merchandise;" and Drayton, also to the same point, mentions "a little maund made of osiers small," and Herrick has "maunds of roses, to strew the way." The last-named poet ("Death has taken away from us our 'maundies'") uses the word in the sense of alms. Thus then, according to Archdeacon Nares in his "Glossary," Maundy Thursday, the day preceding Good Friday, on which the king or queen of England distributes alms to a certain number of poor persons at Whitehall, is so named from the "maunds" in which the gifts were contained. This interesting old custom is still kept up by Her Majesty, as we may see from the daily papers. Anciently, on Maundy Thursday, the kings and queens of England washed and kissed the feet of as many poor men and women as they were years old, besides bestowing their maundy on each. Queen Elizabeth performed this at Greenwich, when she was thirty-nine years old, on which occasion the feet of the same number of poor persons were first washed by the yeomen of the laundry with warm water and sweet herbs, afterwards by the sub-almoner, and lastly by the queen herself; the person who washed making each time a cross on the pauper's foot above the toes, and kissing it. This ceremony was performed by the queen kneeling, being attended by thirty-nine ladies and gentlemen. Clothes, victuals, and money were then distributed among the poor. James the Second is said to have been the last of our monarchs who performed this ceremony in person.

A FRENCH "APRIL FOOL."—The April Fool among the French is called "un poisson d'Avril." Their transformation of the term is not well accounted for, but their customs on the day are similar to ours. In one instance a joke was carried too far. At Paris, on the 1st of April, 1817, a young lady pocketed a watch in the house of a friend. She was arrested the same day, and taken before the correctional police, when being charged with the fact, she said it was an April trick—"un poisson d'Avril." She was asked whether the watch was in her custody. She denied it, but a messenger was sent to her apartment, and it was found on the mantelpiece. Upon which the young lady calmly said that she "had made the messenger an April Fool." This pleasantry, however, did not end so happily, for the fair one was jocularly recommended to remain in the house of correction till the 1st of April, 1818, and then to be discharged as "un poisson d'Avril." This case is recorded in the "Morning Chronicle" of June, 1817.

STRANGE STORY OF A WILL.—The Rev. Dr. F. G. Lee, in his "Glimpses of the Supernatural" (vol. 1, p. 246) relates the following remarkable anecdote. "A Gloucestershire gentleman in good circumstances, who for many years had lived a retired life, quite apart from his relations, some of whom in a previous year had been cast in a lawsuit with him for the recovery of certain properties, suddenly died, and,

as was supposed, died intestate. He had long intended, at the advice of the rector of the village in which he dwelt, and with whom alone he was on terms of intimacy, to make certain provisions by will on behalf of the relations in question, who had lost much by his successful lawsuit. However, this (as was believed by his family lawyer, residing in an adjacent country town, who proceeded to settle his affairs) had not been done; and the whole of his property consequently seemed likely to go to his heir-at-law, a man of property, almost unknown to him. Five months after his death, however, the rector had what he termed a 'waking dream,' in which he imagined that the deceased gentleman came to him in sorrow, and solemnly conjured him to obtain possession of a will, which had been duly made by him in London a few months before his decease, and which was in the custody of a firm of attorneys there, which will was so drawn as that the relations in question should greatly benefit by the righteous disposition therein of his property. Imagining the dream to be only a dream and nothing more, he took no notice of it. In about a fortnight the identical dream occurred again, with the simple difference that the deceased gentleman bore an expression of deeper grief, and appeared to urge him in still stronger terms to obtain the will. The rector was much impressed by this, but on subsequent reflection appeared indisposed on such testimony to interfere with the arrangements, and consequently did nothing. A third time however, about eight days afterwards, he had the same dream, with certain additional details. The deceased person, as the rector imagined, urged him most solemnly to do as he wished and to go and obtain the will. A conversation took place as it were in the dream. . . . However at last he consented, and still in his dream accompanied the deceased person to a certain lawyer's office at a certain number, on a certain floor in Staple Inn, on the south side of Holborn, where the drawer in a writing table was opened, and he saw the packet containing the wills sealed in three places with the deceased person's armorial bearings. The whole room was before him vividly. It was panelled in oak, picked out with white and pale green, and over the mantelpiece hung an engraving of Lord Eldon. The rector awoke and resolved without delay to do as he was enjoined. Before proceeding he mentioned the circumstance of the thrice-repeated dream to a clerical friend, who volunteered to accompany him to London on his important errand. They went together; neither had ever been to Staple Inn before, nor did they know its exact whereabouts. On inquiry however it was soon found, and so was the room and office, with the furniture and print of Lord Eldon, which had been seen beforehand by the rector in the dream, to his intense awe and wonderment. Even the peculiar handles of the writing-table, which were of brass and old-fashioned, were those which had been clearly apparent. The identical drawer was opened and the will, secured in an envelope of stout paper and sealed with three impressions, was found just as it had been seen in the dream. The lawyer, who at once gave every facility for inquiry, was a junior partner in the firm which had drawn it up, and had only recently come to London from a cathedral city, where the firm in question had a branch office, on the death of the chief partner. The will was found to be good and valid, and was in due course proved. Under it the relations, who had so suffered by the loss of their lawsuit as to have been almost reduced to penury, obtained their due. The whole of these facts are vouched for by a friend of the editor (Dr. Lee, vicar of All Saints, Lambeth), of this book."

AN ODD BACHELOR.—In March, 1798, died, aged eighty-four, at his house in the neighbourhood of Kentish Town, where he had resided more than fifty years, John Little, Esq. His life exemplified the small utility of money in possession of such a man. A few days before his death the physician who attended upon him advised that he should occasionally drink a glass of wine. After much persuasion he was induced to comply, yet by no means would entrust even

his housekeeper with the key of the cellar. He insisted on being carried to the cellar door, and when it was opened he delivered out one bottle. By his removal for that purpose from a warm bed into a dark, humid vault, he was seized with a shivering fit, which terminated in an apoplectic stroke, and occasioned his death. He had an inveterate antipathy to the marriage state, and discarded his brother, the only relative he had, for not continuing, like himself, a bachelor. On examining his effects it appeared that he had £25,000 in different tontines, £11,000 in the four per cents, and £2,000 in landed property. In a room which had been closed for fourteen years were found 173 pairs of breeches, and a numerous collection of other articles of wearing apparel, besides 180 wigs hoarded in his coach-house, all which had fallen to him with other property by the bequest of relations. All his worldly wealth fell to the possession of his offending brother.

EXTRAORDINARY MARRIAGES.—Among the many remarkable marriages on record none are more curious than those in which the bridegroom has proved to be of the same sex as the bride. Last century there lived a woman who dressed in male attire, and who was constantly going about captivating other women and marrying them! On the fifth of July, 1777, she was tried at a criminal court in London for thus disguising herself, and it was proved that at various times she had been married to three women, and defrauded them of their money and their clothes. The fair deceiver was required by the justices to give the daughters of the citizens an opportunity of making themselves acquainted with her features by standing in the pillory at Chapside; and after going through this ordeal, she was imprisoned for six months. . . . In July, 1768, a couple were living in Essex who had been married eighty one years, the husband being 107, and the wife 103 years of age. At the church of St. Clement Danes, in the Strand, London, in 1772, a woman of eighty five was married to her sixth husband.

FEMALE CRICKETERS.—From the "Derby Mercury," No. 22, August 16, 1745: "The greatest cricket match that was ever played in the south part of England was on Friday, the 26th of last month, on Gosden Common, near Guildford, between eleven maids of Bramley and eleven maids of Hambleton, dressed all in white. The Bramley girls got 119 notches, and the Hambleton girls 127. There was of both sexes the greatest number that ever was seen on such an occasion. The girls bowled, batted, ran and caught (sic) as well as any men could do."

AN INJURED WOMAN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Double Engagement," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XIII.

WELL MATCHED.

In my lone moments will his image still
Linger around in many a tearful dream,
And sweet remembrance of his love for me
Oft gild my sorrow with a sunny beam.

WRAPT in her labour Rhoda had no thought of friend or enemy near until the slight rustle of Lady Clara's riding habit startled her. Turning hurriedly she met the scornful eyes of the proud, beautiful woman, and knew who she was by instinct but never quailed.

"Lady Clara!" she exclaimed.

"A part of my task is done. I need not announce myself," said Lady Clara. "Woman! how dare you look at me?"

"A strange question from one who is an intruder. This is my place," Rhoda replied.

"You need not remind me of it," was the angry rejoinder. "Am I likely to forget that I was robbed by you of what was mine by every social and just right?"

Rhoda laid aside her brush, removed the easel a little further off, and faced Lady Clara.

standing. There was no bravado, no unseemly audacity, no brazening out a wrong in either her looks or the words that fell from her lips. She was quiet and forbearing, even pitiful, in her demeanour towards the unexpected visitor.

"Lady Clara," she said, "you do me a wrong, and, what is of more importance, yourself a wrong by coming here. What good will result from a bandying of words between you and me? I only wish to be left to such peace as this my house can give me."

"And does it give you peace?" Lady Clara asked.

"As much peace as I can hope to have," Rhoda answered. "In this world there is no peace for man or woman. I have gained all and more than I once desired, but there is still a blank here."

She laid her hand upon her heart, and her brower laughed with sarcastical shrillness. She bordered on vulgarity in her anger, but she was carried away by the assumption of Rhoda that she had need of being loved.

"First the nephew and then the uncle, and finally the home of both," she sneered. "Surely you ought to be satisfied. The wreaking of one family ought to suffice for you."

"Lady Clara," said Rhoda, with a weary look rising in her large, beautiful eyes, "I know you have no real knowledge of my life and I forgive you. When first I met Mr. Vesey Sutherland I was a simple, foolish girl, with wild, vague aspirations. I wanted to rise—" "To be in fact what you never can be—a lady."

"I will not dispute your judgment, let it stand. I was young and impulsive, and I thought I loved him. How he dishonoured his manhood is for him to tell. Then, while bowed down with disappointment, and full of trouble at home, I met with one who showed me a noble generosity and overwhelming confidence in me, and I was carried away. You are a woman and know how easily it is to touch the mainspring of our hearts with generosity."

"Do you mean to assert that you loved Sir Archibald?" asked Lady Clara, with an angry twist of her riding whip.

"I revered him," Rhoda said, "and reverence would have sufficed for me—if he had only been true."

"That is if he had married you?"

Rhoda did not answer.

"I have seen you," Lady Clara continued, "and so far I am content, but I cannot leave you until I let you know what lies ahead. Are you dead to shame?"

A slight pallor came into Rhoda's face, but it died away in a moment. She answered, quietly, but a little proudly:

"No, nor ever can be."

"I thought you poor, beggarly, scheming people," answered Lady Clara, "had no knowledge of the world, but I'll take your word for it that you are still sensitive to the finger of scorn and the voice of reprobation. You cannot face a world that despises you."

"No," said Rhoda.

"Nor walk abroad amid the whispering of women and the light talk of men. Ha! I see I have touched you. It was your hope that here you would live it down—that if you feed the poor and subscribed to charities all your black soul would in the eyes of the world be washed white."

"I had no such thought, Lady Clara."

"It is false. I know your hopes and I will shatter them. Here at least you are already well known, and from the peer to the peasant who labours in a ditch for his bread you are fully known and despised. There is not a woman even in one of the hovels who would change with you for all your ill-gotten wealth."

The roses now left Rhoda's cheeks rapidly for the first time, and, sickly white, she looked at her merciless foe, who laughed again with a bitter cynicism that grated on the ear.

"Perhaps," she went on, "you will think of leaving here with the hope of hiding your shame. Go by all means and I will follow you and proclaim you wherever you are. You shall not rest."

"And is this your determination?"

"My unchangeable determination."

"You will have no mercy?"

"None. Not even in your last moments would I turn aside to give you peace."

"If I have wronged you—"

"If you have—your creature."

"Hear what I have to say, Lady Clara, and do not fall to the level of people like myself by indulging in vulgar abuse. If I wronged you, it was unwittingly, and I am sorry. I did my best to make amends to you. I offered you part of my fortune."

"Which I would have died rather than have touched."

"That was a question for you to consider and you have come to a resolve that you may one day be sorry for. There are other things you will do well to consider also, and take more time over them so as to act wisely—one of them bears upon your future conduct towards me."

Lady Clara glanced superciliously at the slight figure of Rhoda, looking very girlish in the pretty morning wrapper; but the expression slightly changed as she looked at her face.

"How old are you?" she said, suddenly.

"Eighteen," Rhoda replied. "I am eighteen to-day."

"Eighteen, and such a splendid, audacious schemer," said Lady Clara; "if you should live you will be heard of in high places, unless I break your spirit."

"Which you will never do," retorted Rhoda. "I have a strength you cannot shake, and, if you will labour against me, do so, but bear in mind that cursing and slandering are things that often recoil upon those who give them vent. I will bear all you may do patiently for a while, but do not go too far. Now, if you will leave me I shall be glad, as I want to finish my sketch this morning."

She replaced her easel, sat down, selected a brush and began to mix some colour in her palette. Lady Clara, with a brow as black as a tropical thundercloud, stood still looking at her.

That Rhoda was graceful and pretty she could not deny, as graceful and pretty as any woman she had ever seen, but these charms were gall and wormwood to her and she would have struck her down and trampled her underfoot if she dared.

It was not the fear of the known law that kept her back, but the unwritten social code of her own class. What would the world say, her world say, to her assaulting and fighting with one like Rhoda, an outcast from all good people, or rather people who had not been found out? No, she dare not risk that. The coarser weapons of nature must be abandoned, but she could have one more thrust with that rapier of the body—the tongue.

"You have nerve," she said, "but that will not save you. There is no class of honest men or women who will sit beneath the same roof with you."

"We shall see," Rhoda said, and in those simple words Lady Clara fancied she detected a prophetic ring, vague and uncertain but still prophetic. The future, dim and shadowy, just showed itself and was gone, leaving no clear picture for her to dwell upon.

She had said her worst to Rhoda and was not satisfied, because the effort had been almost nil. A lot of powder and heavy shot had been used and no breach made. Rhoda was as calm when she left as when she found her. The words of Lady Clara had been so many pebbles cast into the stream. Circles had been made, but they soon faded out and the waters were smooth again.

With slow steps she returned to the park gate where she had left Vesey Sutherland, and by the time she reached him her face had regained its usual composure. She was a little surprised to find Lord Revaire, and a stranger talking with him. Both had ridden over, but they had dismounted and tied their horses to the gate.

"A little surprise for you, Clara. A friend of mine came over to see me this morning and I

brought him in. Permit me to introduce him: Sir Beresford Blane, Colonel of the Fortieth, and to whom belongs the enviable distinction of being the youngest colonel in the service."

He certainly looked very young. His appearance would not have warranted his being set down at more than thirty-four, and his air and manner were most distinguished. In addition to being the youngest colonel he was also admitted to be one of the handsomest men in the service, and among his closer intimates he was spoken of as Beau Blane.

And yet there was nothing of the beau or fop about him unless the great care he bestowed upon his dress can be considered so. He had the knack possessed by few men of wearing the best things and so harmonising them that nothing was ever marked. He compelled people, as it were, to take and admire him as a whole.

There was just the least tinge of grey in his dark hair if you looked close into it, but otherwise he had all the better features of early manhood unimpaired—a clear, well-bronzed complexion, dark, piercing eyes, a mouth rather full but well shaped, close-out whiskers and long moustache.

Lady Clara thought she had never seen a man to compare with him.

They exchanged bows and a few words, and then he helped her into the saddle with the ease of an accomplished cavalier, and they rode back to Strathlone. He rode beside her all the way, Vesey and Lord Revaire hanging a little in the rear and preserving an almost unbroken silence.

"You will stay and have some luncheon, I hope," Lady Clara said, "unless you have a better way of killing the time."

"Indeed, no," he replied, with a light, pleasant laugh. "I knew nobody about here. I knew Revaire at Eton and we were great chums, although he was my junior by years. I have been in India some time and have come home on two years' leave. On landing I learnt the agreeable news that a distant relation had left me a handsome property in Scotland, and I have been to look at it. On my way back I remembered Revaire and determined to look him up."

"Very kind and thoughtful of you."

"Not at all. When a poor devil finds himself almost forgotten he naturally hunts up his old friends."

"You are in no hurry back to town, I hope?"

"No, I am not going to be in a hurry to go anywhere for the next two years. I have been working hard for a long time and can be lazy with a clear conscience."

"Perhaps you can make up your mind to be lazy at Strathlone for a few days. We are dreadfully dull and shall be very glad of you."

"You are too kind, and I accept with pleasure. Revaire was good enough to invite me first, but I refused him, as I thought it would not be right to tire you just now."

"A little distraction from my sorrow will be most welcome."

Lady Clara sighed and looked the perfection of a bereaved and injured widow. Sir Beresford knew all that was known of her story, and he had expressed some very warm sentiments regarding the conduct of Sir Archibald. Now he was more angry than ever, and he was very sorry for Lady Clara.

He conveyed his sympathy without words, but it was none the less apparent, and the cold, handsome woman felt herself warming under his gentle courtesies.

She was no longer a girl, and as a girl had never been impulsive, but, like all other women, there was a spring within her, that, rightly touched, would quicken the sluggish course of her life.

Before she reached Strathlone she found herself wondering what her life would have been if she had met the handsome colonel a little earlier in life.

Was it too late? It was true that she was yet in the first moon of her widowhood, but he must know, as she knew, that her marriage had been

a loveless one, and that the dead man had forfeited all right even to her respect. Why should she be hypocritical and play the mourner before this man, who might, if he would, make her happy?

She encouraged the dream and was developing it in her boudoir on her return when her brother came hurrying in.

Lord Revaine was a poor specimen of the noble classes it is true, but he was not all that was vile and bad. He could, under great stimulus, feel for another, and he was thinking of the sorrows of one to whom he had never spoken as he entered the boudoir.

"Clara," he said, "what led you to Powerscourt this morning?"

"I wanted to see that woman," Lady Clara replied.

"And having seen her you must needs fall upon her like a wild cat."

"How do you know what I did?"

"I was present at your interview. Don't stare at me as if I intended to play the spy upon you. I was sorry to be there, and I could not see my way to stopping you."

"But how came you there?" Lady Clara demanded.

"Blane and I rode after you," Lord Revaine answered, "and we found that fellow Sutherland at the gate. By the way, hasn't he been here long enough?"

"He may go when he pleases—but pray finish your story."

"Sutherland told us you had strolled into the park, and I was a little astonished. It was a mistake, Clara, and I went in search of you. You know how I found you railing at that girl, she is no more as yet, and I was afraid something might come of it that would disgrace you in the sight or hearing of Blane. So I waited until I found she was a match for you—"

"A match for Mr. Revaine? Have you taken up her defence?"

"I don't think you ought to interfere with her. Finding she could hold her own I went back to Blane and waited for you. But I have not come to talk about that. I have a word or two to say concerning this girl."

"Say it then," said Lady Clara, curiously.

"You must let her alone," said Lord Revaine.

"What are you saying, Revaine? Are you mad?"

"No, I am clear-headed enough, and I mean what I say. Let the girl alone, or I shall take up cudgels on her behalf."

"Good Heaven, Revaine, are you in love with her?"

"That is my affair, Clara. But you must heed me. I'll not have a young creature like that torn to shreds for the edification of you or any other woman living. It is all very well for you to fume, but you have no right to do it. You forget that you regularly hunted Sir Archibald and got him into a corner before he would marry you. We all saw that he wanted to get out of it, and if you had let him alone he might have made an honest woman of that pretty girl."

"Say not another word, Revaine," said Lady Clara, pale as the Grim Destroyer is reputed to be. "Like all men, you can be led to do anything by a pretty face. But henceforth I will have nothing to do with you—more than our meeting before the world as brother and sister demands. In our hearts we will be strangers."

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

An honest soul is like a ship at sea
That sleeps at anchor on the ocean's calm,
But when it races and the wind blows high
She cuts her way with skill and majesty.

Or late there had been an anxiety in Rhoda's breast, an anxiety that deepened with every hour. Her father had changed for the better and for the worse—and it was the latter that had aroused fear within her breast.

He was a quieter and a better man, but he

was no longer ruddy and strong. His once muscular frame had lost its fullness, and the fire in his eyes and the colour of his cheeks were both fast fading. But he made no complaint, and repudiated every affectionate suggestion that he was unwell, and the bare mention of a doctor excited him to mirth.

"It is nothing, Rhoda," he would say. "I have to fight through a change that comes with an altered life, and then I shall soon, in a physical sense, be myself again. What I used to be in other respects I hope never to resume."

"You must find the life here very dull," Rhoda had often suggested.

"Not duller than it is for you, darling," was his answer.

But she knew that he had too much time for thinking. He was not a man of cultivated tastes, and took no pleasure in books; if he had, the vast library of Powerscourt would have given him ample amusement. But he read nothing but the papers, and sometimes he would not look at them for days together.

"He wants society," Rhoda thought.

But where was society for him or her to come from unless they went back to the old place—which neither of them would do? For good or ill they had turned their backs upon the past, and the present offered them only seclusion. There was, however, the doubtful advantages of certain society to be found in French and German watering-places open to them, but Tom Kelly knew enough of such places by hearsay to feel sure that nothing would be gained by going there.

"We will live here," he said, "and if we are patient we shall find friends one day."

On the morning of the meeting between Lady Clara and Rhoda he had broken the bounds of Powerscourt Park and gone across country for a stroll. Rhoda did not chill his returning warmth with an account of that meeting. She had decided to bear the weight of enmity, as far as possible, alone.

"I had a stroll by the stream," he said, "which the people tell me is full of trout. I am no great fisherman, but I met a very good sort of fellow who knows how to throw the fly. We had a chat together."

"Was he a gentleman?" inquired Rhoda.

"Undoubtedly; but a poor one. A better fellow I never met, and, what is strange, he knew me, for he spoke to me by name. I think if we went out a little more we should find the people civil. But I ought to tell you that he is not a resident here. Only staying to amuse himself for a time."

"Which accounts for his civility perhaps," said Rhoda, quietly.

"Suppose I met him again," said her father, hesitating, "and we got on well together, may I ask him here? You need not see him unless you like, and to have a nice, gentlemanly fellow to smoke and chat with occasionally would be a perfect boon to me."

"Ask him by all means," Rhoda said, "and I see no reason why I should hide from him. Is he young?"

"Thirty perhaps. A plain man, with a wonderfully taking face. I would say that he has a lot in him."

The next day Tom Kelly went out again, and he brought his new-found friend back with him. It was no other than Mat Ardent, who had deliberately laid himself out to be invited to Powerscourt, with the object of becoming acquainted with its young and beautiful mistress.

Rhoda, when she saw him, remembered in an instant seeing him in the park in company with Vesey Sutherland, and she was appalled. But in a moment she was at ease, for Mat Ardent saluted her with a grave, respectful air, blended with a little touching interest that dispelled all fear, and ere luncheon was over they were all chatting like old friends.

Not the slightest hint that they had ever met before escaped him, nor did he in any way refer to the Sutherlands. Of himself he spoke freely enough, and Rhoda was very much amused at his frankness.

"I write a little," he said, "and I get daily

bread. I would write more if I could get it to do, but the market is crowded with women who have the power to write all day and all night, and publishers are harassed to death with manuscripts. You, of course, have written something?"

A slight addition of colour to Rhoda's cheek told that he had hit the mark. She answered readily.

"Yes," she said, "I spend an hour occasionally in writing."

"A romance of real life no doubt," Mat said. "You have just reached the age when a woman thinks that her story on paper would be read by a delighted public. Come now, confess that I have read your thoughts."

"Indeed you have," replied Rhoda, "you must be a magician."

"Not at all," he said, "I would say the same thing to nine young ladies out of ten and be right. They have all had their 'experiences' as they call them, and they love to see themselves in print. But take my advice, don't publish. Books are very disappointing things to authors."

"I am inclined to hope you have not found yours so."

"I do not let them disappoint me," he said, "for I write, I interview my publisher, get a cheque, and wash my hands of the whole business. I shall know when the world has had enough of me. My publisher will not delay in telling me of the falling off, and until my death warrant as an author comes I shall write on—indifferent."

Rhoda rapidly learnt to like him, for Mat Ardent was one of those men who can gain a woman's friendship almost without an effort, but seldom is fortunate in securing her love. There are many men of his class in the world, and their lot is an unfortunate one, for they know too well how to love and rarely get more than esteem in return. Esteem is a poor thing to satisfy the cravings of a strong man's heart.

Ere long Mat became a frequent visitor at Powerscourt, and Rhoda encouraged his coming. Any other man might have misinterpreted the warmth of the invitation that was given him, but Mat was too learned in human nature to misread even where he loved.

Rhoda charmed him as woman never charmed him before, and he could guess the height and depth and intensity of the suffering in store, but he did not shrink from it, nor avoid that which added to the volume of his coming misery.

For the present he could bask in the sunshine of her presence, and he asked no more. He had no successful rival to torture him at present, and he would not anticipate the agony of the time to come.

"Only fools discount a coming pain," he said. "I will not think of it."

Ere a week was out riding was suggested by Tom Kelly for Rhoda. Mat, in the course of conversation, admitted that in his youth he had been a tolerable equestrian, and he was forthwith called upon to exhibit his accomplishment.

"You must teach Rhoda," Kelly said, "for myself, I am too old to learn."

He might have said he was too weak, for although Mat Ardent's visits had increased his spirits his bodily health continued to be on the wane.

The inevitable reaping of a bad and careless sowing was shortly to be gathered in. The fiat had gone forth that he was to die and there was no hope of reprieve.

He knew it, but he kept the secret close and bewailed it only when he was alone. What he endured then, and what he did in the way of seeking forgiveness for a most wretched past, are things that can have no place here. He was no better than a great many of us and no worse, and he had the good fortune to find out the errors of his way ere it was too late.

Meanwhile Rhoda learned to ride under the tuition of Mat Ardent, and she soon acquired a sufficient knowledge of the art to make a very creditable appearance on horseback. Three good horses were put into the stable—Mat purchased them, and a groom was engaged.



[CROSS PURPOSES.]

"There is no reason why you should not ride abroad," Kelly said to his daughter. "Ardant will take care of you."

Rhoda demurred for awhile, but at last consented, and she and Mat rode out towards Strathlone, ignorant or indifferent to whither their road tended. Ere they had travelled a mile they met Lady Clara accompanied by two gentlemen, also on horseback.

Lady Clara passed on with affected indifference, although her white face revealed a storm within, but the two gentlemen looked at Rhoda with undisguised interest.

"Confound them all," muttered Mat Ardant, as he passed them, "they treat her as if she were a curiosity."

"Who are you grumbling at?" asked Rhoda, with a smile.

"Those two fellows who have just gone by."

"You know who they are perhaps?"

"The one with the dissipated face is Lord Ravaine, the other Sir Beresford Blane, colonel of the fortieth."

"He has a nice face."

"Who, this colonel?"

"Yes, there is a quietude about it, a repose that I like to see in a man," Rhoda said. "I can fancy him walking up to the very cannon's mouth without a change of colour."

"You are gifted with a strong fancy, but strong fancies are dangerous things and often lead people into false judgments."

"You don't like Colonel Blane?" said Rhoda, lowering her eyes quietly upon him.

"I have never spoken to him in my life," replied Mat.

"But that is not an answer. You do not like him?"

"I have not thought of him at all until today."

Rhoda laughed and did not pursue the subject. She had an idea of the reason for Mat Ardant's dislike and felt that it would be dangerous ground to tread upon. She suggested a

canter and, giving her horse the rein, led the way.

With the exception of this meeting the ride was a very pleasant one and long remained a red-letter day in the author's calendar. They were not back until past six o'clock and he remained for dinner.

That night Tom Kelly was more thoughtful than he had been for a long time, but he talked a little now and then and showed no sign of sadness until Rhoda retired and left the two men over their wine. Then a cloud seemed to settle upon him.

"Ardant," he said, "draw up a little closer, will you? I have something to say that I would not have the very walls hear. Fill your glass. It is no tale of horror and will not spoil your wine."

Mat Ardant shifted his chair and helped himself to claret. Tom Kelly made a sign for him not to pass the bottle just yet.

"I have not known you very long, Ardant," he said, "but I know enough of you to feel sure that I may trust you with what I wish to be kept a secret for the present. I am dying, and ere a month is over feel sure that I shall leave you."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Mat, "don't talk in that way."

"Oh, it is true enough and there is no help for it."

"But you have not seen a doctor yet? Surely a little advice would be of service to you."

"No, but I will take it to satisfy Rhoda. I know that nothing can save me. I have been going down hill for a long time and I see the end ahead. But putting aside myself for awhile I must talk of Rhoda. You have a great regard for her?"

It was on the lips of Mat Ardant to confess to something warmer, but he checked himself and said:

"A very great regard."

"In you," pursued Kelly, with his eyes resting thoughtfully upon the table, "I think I have found such a friend as she will need when

I am gone. Rhoda, in a measure, has her career in her own hands, but she is young and unscrupulous foes may trample upon her."

"She has one foe at least who will show her no mercy."

"You mean Lady Clara. From her Rhoda will get none, and I ask of you, as a dying man, to watch over my darling until she has reached the pinnacle she must and shall reach."

"And that pinnacle?"

"Is that of a woman of position loved and honoured."

Mat Ardant did not say anything to this. He drank his wine and refilled his glass slowly. When that was done he said:

"I will be true as steel to her, ay, true, though it lead me to death."

"Your hand upon it, Ardant."

Their hands met in a warm, honest grasp and Tom Kelly gave a sigh of satisfaction. He took one glass of wine and proposed they should join Rhoda in the drawing-room.

He did not renew the subject until some days after and then he renewed it for the last time. The spirit upon him when he spoke of his advancing death was a truly prophetic one, and the end came rapidly. The very next day he took to his bed and never rose from it again.

Medical skill of the best was obtained, but it was of no avail. The learned men examined him, spoke as hopefully as they could, and took their fees with the full conviction that nothing could save him. Rhoda, in any agony of tears, heard the true verdict when it could be no longer withheld.

And then came the final scene, too full of sacred sorrow for us to dwell upon. He died with his arm round the neck of his darling daughter and one hand clasping Mat Ardant's.

"You will remember," he said to him, "she may need you."

"I will be true as steel," Mat replied; and then with a soft sigh the spirit of a once reckless man left its tenement of clay.

(To be Continued.)



[STARTLING EVIDENCE.]

POOR JACK.

(A COMPLETE STORY).

CHAPTER I.

AFTERNOON—SUNSHINE.

No fairer, fresher spot round London, no wider, healthier expanse of open ground than this of Tooting Beck and Waveney. Robbed of some portion of its quiet charm, perhaps, by the cutting which intersects it from corner to corner for the passage of thundering locomotives and their freight of passengers or luggage trains. But, save where one comes close upon the line, the iron track is not an obtrusive figure in the landscape, and for the rest there is a quiet, peaceful calm about the old common that makes it a favourite haunt of many of those toilers in our modern Babylon who, debarred by their avocations from more than a few hours' absence from the scene of their daily labour, cannot live on bread alone, but require to look sometimes upon green fields and hedgerows, trees and the yellow-blossomed furze.

All these are to be found in abundance round about Tooting and Streatham Common, from whose top the glittering glass palace over Norwood way seems but a few steps distant; and because it is so, because he delights in Nature, while stern necessity—the necessity which compels most men to earn their bread—bids him toil during his working hours in a close, confined little back room on the ground floor of the Fleet Street office wherefrom issues the "Daily Mentor," it is in this vicinity that Jack Denville has pitched his tent and sits, when rare occasion furnishes him with the luxury of an idle hour, under the shadow of his own vine and fig tree.

Not in any of the staid old family mansions that line the borders of the common, inhabited for the most part now, as of yore, by wealthy

cits with their wives and olive branches, nor in the newer-built but still older-fashioned dwellings that have lately sprung up in the airiest positions. These abodes are not for Jack Denville.

Not as yet, that is. The time may come when he can aspire so high, and being young—his years not numbering thirty—hopeful, and not short of brains withal, he often tells himself that it shall come. He tells another so too, or rather repeats it to himself, for is not she who listens to all he says, and believes him so implicitly—as well she may, indeed—himself again, "bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh," his dear wife, Lucy?

Hardly six months wedded yet, they are as much lovers now as in the time—not a very protracted one—before Lucy Norton gave herself into Jack's keeping. He is not rich, all they have to live upon at present is his income as sub-editor of the "Daily Mentor," but that is sufficient for their needs, ample enough, eked out as it is by sundry odd jobs at translating and contributions to the magazines, to allow of a more pretentious style of living than that which now contents them; but Jack is provident, his young wife prudent and careful of his means, and a little nest-egg is gradually accumulating against ill times, or, should fortune smile upon them by-and-bye, to swell their means.

For the present they are content to "cut their coat according to their cloth," as the good, expressive old saying has it, and dwell in a little six-roomed, semi-detached villa, one of a modest row rejoicing in the high-sounding name of Montmorency Avenue, that lies somewhat in the rear of the more pretentious residences surrounding the common. But one of those residences Jack Denville has set his heart upon, and he and Lucy gravely discuss which is to be their future home when "their ship comes home," as they walk to the station together in the afternoon, for Jack's work being at night he never leaves home till after an early tea, returning in the small hours, and Lucy always sees him off.

She likes the stroll, as she would like anything that would keep her near him, but of late, though the distance is very little more than a mile, it has seemed to tire her. But there is a reason for that, a reason that was a secret to all but herself until a few days since, when, with her face hidden on Jack's broad chest, her slender waist encircled by his strong right arm, she whispered it to him, and he—

Well, he thought, he told her—a tenderer light in his honest eye, a softer accent in his tones—that he had been so happy before that any increase of his joy was impossible, but the glad news she brought him completed his sum of earthly happiness.

And it is this that makes him so extra attentive now towards her, careful to spare her all fatigue, even unwilling that she should take that daily walk to the station with him, from which she must return alone. But Lucy laughs at him—she has got over her first shyness—and insists that she is quite strong enough for so small a matter, so off they trudge this afternoon as usual, sauntering across the common, for they always start in plenty of time, and reach at last the station.

There they take a seat upon the platform, side by side, so close they might be taken for lovers rather than man and wife. Indeed, the foolish fellow, fancying no one observes him, will not let go of Lucy's hand, but clasps it in his beneath the little muff which she carries, for the afternoon, though bright, is sharp.

But though the platform is empty, they are not quite unnoticed, as Lucy quickly detects. At the window of the little waiting-room, just visible over the wire blind, is the face of a woman whose eyes are fixed upon them—fixed, too, with such a demoniac expression as startles Lucy, and makes her utter a low cry of terror as she snatches her hand away from Jack.

At which he stares, confounded by such an unprecedented action on her part.

"Why, what on earth's the matter?" he asks, half amused, half perplexed.

Lucy stammers out something confusedly to the effect that they were being watched.

"Is that all?" laughs Jack, good-humouredly. "Well, I sincerely hope that the modesty of the watcher has not sustained a very severe shock. But I don't see anyone."

And he gives a glance round as he speaks.

"No," says Lucy, "she—she was inside—at the window."

"Oh! a snee, was it?" Jack remarks, slightly. "Though of course that goes without saying. A man would have discreetly turned his head the other way. Much good may all she saw do the elderly party. Is she there still?"

"No. She disappeared as soon as you turned round. But, Jack, I didn't say she was elderly."

"I am perfectly aware of that, my dear, but that also does not require to be said," argues Jack. "A young woman would probably sympathise with what she would look upon as a case of spoons, and take care not to observe anything."

"But this was a young woman," Lucy insists. "At least," correcting herself, "perhaps not exactly young, but by no means old, or even elderly."

"A starched, prim old maid, I'll be bound."

Lucy shakes her head.

"She didn't look so," she says. "I don't think I ever saw a handsomer face, but, oh, Jack, so wicked!"

"Wicked?"

"I might almost say fiendish. Don't laugh, Jack, I'm not fanciful, she was looking straight at you."

"What, jealous, little woman? Do you fancy I've made a conquest?"

"Jack! how can you? As if I could think of such a thing. No, if there was anything in her look it was hate."

"What next will you fancy?" says Jack, but there is a vague shadow of unrest in his eyes, his voice loses some of its lightness. "Why should a strange woman hate me?"

"I didn't say that—only she looked so fierce—perhaps it was fancy though after all."

"Perhaps? Say certainly it was, that would be nearer truth. Let me see for myself."

"No, Jack, don't."

But he is gone, to return almost immediately.

"It strikes me," he said, "that you not only fancied the eyes but the person they belonged to. There is no one in the waiting-room—has been no one, the porter says."

"But I'm quite sure," emphatically begins Lucy.

"Tut, tut! don't be a little goose," and Jack stops her with a kiss, for he is just about to jump into the train for Victoria that has drawn up alongside the platform, and if the whole staff of the railway company and the train full of passengers were looking he would not omit that parting salute. "Go to bed early and get a good night's rest, for I want to take you to a morning performance at the Gaiety to-morrow, if you're well enough to go."

"Oh, Jack! I'm so glad. Can you get away?"

"Of course, or I shouldn't ask you, should I?" He is talking to her now out of the window of the smoking compartment. "It's Saturday, so I shan't be wanted at the shop, and Slaughton has asked me to do the notice of the new piece for him, so it'll be combining business with pleasure, and a little profit into the bargain, my dear. Ta, ta! Go quietly home, mind, and take care of yourself till I see you again."

Till he sees her again! Ah! if Jack Denville only knew all that is to happen before then, the grief, the overwhelming despair that is to fall upon and utterly crush her with its weight, he would leap out of the train even now, risking his life to get back to her side and shield her from harm.

But he does not know, how should he? and he goes off with a light heart, puffing contentedly at his highly-coloured meerschaum, and planning in his mind for the morrow a snug little dinner after the play, and a quiet evening with

some music to follow at home to finish up with.

Once a little cloud comes over his features, an uneasy look, and he gazes thoughtfully before him.

"Pshaw!" he exclaims, at last, impatiently, as he relights the pipe which in his reverie he has allowed to go out unnoticed. "What an absurd idea."

CHAPTER II.

EVENING—SHADE.

Is it coincidence merely, or is it that their minds are so completely in rapport, that the cloud which for a brief interval has darkened Jack Denville's mental horizon communicates itself to Lucy and casts over her a shadow of gloom?

Something there is, she knows not what, oppresses Lucy; a feeling of disquiet for which she can in no way account, for which there seems no tangible reason.

All she is conscious of is that it exists, and oddly enough associated with it is the remembrance of that malevolent face, those baleful, sombre eyes that she had detected fixed upon her husband with such fierce intensity from behind the wire blind of the waiting-room window.

It is ridiculous to allow so small a circumstance to weigh upon her, to invest it with a significance which her common sense tells her has no being, and as Lucy is not given, in spite of her ignorance of the world and a slightly nervous temperament, to allowing fancies to take the place of her soberer reason, she succeeds after a little while in shaking off in some degree the sensation of depression which has held her since Jack's departure.

So successful, indeed, is she that by the time she reaches again her favourite spot upon the common she has almost entirely forgotten the thought with which she started from the station, and sits down upon an old tree stump which bears, among many others carved with more or less of elaboration upon its smooth upper surface, the initials of Jack and herself.

That is one reason, the only reason, it would be better to say, for her never passing that old tree stump without stopping. It was there, just opposite the decayed trunk, blasted and withered, but of enormous girth, and fenced in from the rude assaults of sacrilegious London roughs by a stout palisade, that Jack brought her one day from the grim, sombre town lodging where the first great sorrow of her before uneventful life had fallen upon her, and then in a few simple but earnest words, the true ring of which went straight to her heart and told her what, if she had never confessed it to herself before, made her the happiest girl upon this lower earth, told her he loved her, that if she could care enough for him, etc., etc.

The old, old story that, let those who tell such relate never so often, can never stale or pall. It was fresh to her, as fresh and new as when spoken to our first mother in Eden by the father of all the human race; but was it so with Jack Denville?

Hardly; one may be almost certain of that and yet be in entire ignorance of his former life. It is not necessary even to be something of a cynic to accept as a foregone conclusion that to find a man arrived at nine and twenty years, the last ten spent alone and uncontrolled in the midst of the numberless temptations that beset youth in a great city, with each separate page in his life as spotless and unsullied as that of a girl scarcely out of her teens whose days have been spent in almost conventual seclusion, would be indeed to chance upon a rara avis, and very possibly then Jack Denville had not passed scathless through the furnace, though Lucy Norton, looking into the frank, honest grey eyes that met hers when at last, after repeated persuasion, she ventured timidly to raise them, and listening to the low but manly voice that wooed her, would almost have doubted an angel from Heaven had one appeared before

her then with words that seemed to throw a doubt upon Jack's perfect truth.

Certainly she knew nothing of him but what he himself told her, but that was enough for her.

An orphan with no relations but a well-to-do uncle, who having paid for his schooling, offered Jack a stool in his office—that of a shipping firm in Liverpool—he, a lad of nineteen then, preferred to carve out his own fortune in more congenial pursuits, and coming to London with no more wealth than a ten-pound note, his uncle's parting gift, and a fair stock of clothes, embarked upon the troubled sea of literature.

To tell in detail even a little of his varied experiences would be outside the limits of a brief record like this, which has to deal only with one brief but memorable incident in his career, an incident that was to bear bitter fruit in after time and work him irreparable woe. Enough to say that after many ups and downs, such as are inseparable from the life Jack Denville had elected to follow, he emerged from the rack at last.

His capabilities were recognised in more than one quarter, and he obtained permanent employment upon the staff of the "Daily Mentor," from which he rose soon afterwards to the responsible and hardworked position of sub-editor of that mighty power in the Fourth Estate.

It was at this stage in his career that he encountered Lucy Norton. The rise of salary and improved prospects, consequent upon his promotion, warranted a change of quarters; besides, he wanted to be nearer his work, so, not without some little regret, he left his quiet lodging in a northern suburb and took up his abode in Guildford Street, where he occupied the drawing-room floor, that beneath—the parlours—being tenanted by an invalid lady and her niece.

Not often did Lucy Norton and Jack Denville meet, his hours at home being spent chiefly in sleep, but they sometimes encountered each other, and after a time exchanged greetings. Lucy's was a sweet if not perhaps a regularly beautiful face, and often the hard-worked sub-editor of the "Daily Mentor" found his necessary hours of rest seriously curtailed by visions of her slight figure and modest air.

But Jack had not much time for sentimental musings, and what of tenderness was kindled in his breast might have smouldered a long time before bursting into flame had not circumstances precipitated the end.

Miss Norton, Lucy's aunt, died rather suddenly. Not that the event was altogether unlooked for, but she had been ailing so long without any actually dangerous symptoms that when at length the summons came it seemed almost as abrupt as though it had found her in good health.

Then it was found that the small income on which she had lived and supported her dead brother's orphan child was but a life annuity, and consequently Lucy was left absolutely destitute to face the world but for a few pounds, the remains of her aunt's last half-year's dividends, and perhaps about as much more as might accrue from the sale of such few poor trinkets as Miss Norton had left.

It was a sad position, although, alas! not an uncommon one for others as ill fitted as was Lucy Norton either by education or knowledge of the world to face. But Jack Denville solved the problem that was placed before her when, in little more than two months after the event that left her alone in the world, he asked her to trust her future in his hands, and she simply and gratefully, feeling too in her inmost heart that out of all the world there was no other man whom she could love if not him, accepted the offer without the thought ever entering her innocent, unworried mind that aught but love as perfect as her own had prompted it.

Nor in this simple truthfulness did Lucy do more than justice to the man who had sought and won her. Something there was perhaps of chivalric tenderness, of desire to help her who was so helpless in the only way that seemed possible to him, but at the bottom, underlying

all other motives, was love—love pure and undefiled, only embittered by one remembrance that as yet he resolved, after much thought, it was needless to make her a sharer in.

"If I thought it would make any difference, that the knowledge would make her give me a different answer," he mused to himself. "I would tell her all the whole story of that miserable past that nearly wrecked my life. But it is past, done with for ever, thank Heaven! Why should I rake it up? Why show to her what wickedness there is in the world? Let the dead past bury its dead. Perhaps some day I may tell her, but not now."

Ah! Had he only done so then and there! Unavailing the after cry of despair and bitter self-reproach that his deliberate silence cost him. The end was misery, when so little, a few brief words then spoken, would have stayed all future mischief.

So Lucy Norton returned to Guildford Street Jack's promised wife, much to the delight of the good landlady, and three weeks afterwards Jack—who in the meantime had taken lodgings away from the house, mindful of the world's tongue—was joined at St. Pancras Church by Dick Slashington, dramatic critic and caustic leader writer on the "Daily Mentor," upon whose arm leaned pretty, gentle Lucy, who departed therefrom Mrs. Denville.

Then after a week's holiday spent in a quiet village on the Devonshire coast, they returned to take up their abode in the semi-detached red-brick villa at Tooting, a life before them seemingly full of promise of peaceful happiness—a promise that might, nay, would have been fulfilled but for a man's foolish if natural reluctance to appear in anything but the most perfect light before the woman he loved.

Is it a foreshadowing of what is so shortly to befall her? or is it really that as the evening hours draw on apace while Lucy Denville sits there, recalling with lingering fondness the sweet vows she listened to and answered on that spot on a day not long gone by, a coldness not all due to atmospheric influence seems to strike upon her heart?

She rises at last with a little shiver, puts her hands within her muff, and trudges homeward, not quite so light of foot or heart as when she started, though she chides herself inwardly for being so unaccountably nervous, reaching at last the little house which in her mind is as a palace, and knocking at the door to be admitted by her only servant, an awkward but strong-limbed and ruddy-cheeked country girl, who greets her with an announcement that rather scares Lucy.

"A lady waiting to see me?" she repeats, wondering, for she has no visiting acquaintances in the neighbourhood, and Esther is perfectly acquainted with the very few friends who sometimes call upon her. "Did she give any name?"

"No, ma'am," answers the girl, a little nervously. "She said you wouldn't know it, and insisted on coming in and waiting till you came home, and I didn't know what to do, she seemed that determined, and she had got inside the door too before I quite knew, or I don't think I'd have let her in till you came. I—I couldn't help it, ma'am."

"No, no; of course not, Esther," Lucy says, kindly, for she sees the girl is afraid she may be angry. "Where is the lady?"

"In the front parlour, ma'am," Esther replies, not having been long enough from the country to understand that even in six-roomed houses that term has given way to "drawing-room"; "the gas is lit."

Without waiting to take off her bonnet, only unfastening her cloak and handing her muff to Esther with instructions to take it upstairs, Lucy opens the door of the parlour and goes in.

The blended light from the gas, and that not wholly departed yet, which struggles in through the window, combine to dazzle her sight a little at first, but only for a moment, then she recognises in the head that surmounts the full, handsome figure that rises and confronts her the worn yet striking features and wicked gleaming

eyes of the woman she has so lately seen watching her and Jack through the waiting-room window at the station.

CHAPTER III.

NIGHT—DARKNESS.

WHAT instinct is it that tells Lucy the presence of this stranger, this woman whose bold and striking beauty has all the attributes of a fallen angel, bodes evil to her?

She knows not, yet a sure prescience tells her it is so. Absurd, ridiculous upon the face of it as her suddenly-formed fear may be, it is no less absolute and certain, and with an involuntary gesture she shrinks back towards the door that she has just closed behind her, and extends her hands as though to ward off some menaced blow, while a quick little gasp of terror escapes her lips, which quiver and turn pale as the blood leaves them.

A mocking, contemptuous smile plays about the woman's mouth, her eyes gleam with a dangerous light that fascinates Lucy, but the stranger speaks no word, only stands there confronting her with that pitiless gaze.

"Who—who are you?" falters Lucy, at last gathering courage. "I am not aware—"

"To what you owe the pleasure of this visit." That is the polite form, my dear, and you should have commenced in that fashion. It is rude to ask a visitor so bluntly. Who are you?"

It is a deep, rich voice, and full of music, that issues from the full, ripe lips of red, but Lucy shudders as it falls upon her ear, for spite its melody there is in it a ring of concentrated passion, a warning given which tells that beneath the apparently calm surface a volcano rages which presently will find a vent.

"I—I beg your pardon," Lucy says, regaining with an effort some little share of self-command. "I had no intention to be discourteous, but I am unused to strangers, and—"

"Nay, pray do not look upon me as a stranger," says the woman, interrupting her. "You have seen me before—once, you know."

"I?"

"Yes. Oh, do not pretend you forget, and it was so short a time ago. Hardly an hour. What a pretty picture you made—you and Jack."

Lucy starts indignantly. This is too much to bear. What can the woman mean—unless she is mad?

And at this thought, which certainly seems the most rational explanation of her strange visitor's conduct, she turns quickly to leave the room, but with a swift, sinuous step that somehow reminds her of the gliding of a serpent, the other gains the door first and bars her exit.

"I really cannot allow you to behave so rudely," she says, with an ugly sneer that distorts her beautiful mouth. "You—ah!"

For Lucy, voiceless with fear—she is convinced now that she is shut up alone with a madwoman—has darted round the table and has her fingers on the bell-pull, but before she has time to ring she feels herself grasped by a hand which though white and soft has power sufficient to hold her as it might a reed, and is forced into a chair.

"Fool!" hisses the woman, looking down upon her with a scornful smile. "I am not going to hurt you. Be silent," for Lucy's lips are parted, but she cannot scream, as she would, terror so much overcomes her, "I have come to do you a service, if you will calm yourself enough to listen to me."

Lucy looks at her blankly, only half understanding the sense of what she hears, but presently begins to show signs of more consciousness.

"That is better," the other says, when this result arrives; "you need not trouble yourself to talk just yet, if you don't feel equal to it. All that is necessary is that you should listen. Shall I go on?"

Lucy can only nod assent, and the other proceeds.

"I was remarking," she says, slowly and deliberately, a set, vindictive smile upon her

face, "what a pretty picture you and—I won't mention his name again yet, since you don't like it—you and another person I will say—made as you sat so lovingly side by side. It was quite pastoral, if one may use such a word in connection with so unromantic a spot as a railway platform. Shall I tell you—I have a curious fancy to do so if you will permit me—what I was thinking of as I stood watching you? It was very rude of me, was it not? I saw you thought so, and that was why I did not stay when I found that you had discovered my eyes were upon you. I thought then that I should like to have had you and—him—photographed at that moment, the picture would make such an admirable pendant to this."

She has been opening a card-case during her speech, and as it finishes she draws from out it an oblong piece of cardboard which she holds—still with that evil glitter in her eyes, that mocking curl of her lips—before Lucy's fascinated gaze.

At first the poor girl's vision is so blurred and indistinct that she can see nothing plainly, but it presently grows clear, and she looks upon—what?

An old and somewhat faded photograph of two figures seated on a grassy mound beneath overhanging bushes. The one, a woman young and gloriously lovely, with the same face as that which now is close to hers, but not, as now, full of evil passions and bearing traces of a stormy life, looking down upon another—a man's—who stretched at full length at her feet upon the grass, holds the woman's hand in his as he returns her loving gaze with one as ardent and impassioned.

And in that man's features, younger though they are in that old photograph than as she knows them now, with only a slight moustache in place of the full beard he wears, Lucy recognises—Jack.

And beneath, in the writing she knows and loves so well—for is it not his, Jack's own?—a line from a song she has often heard him sing:

We sat by the river, you and I.
Bella and I, June 30th, 1870.

"Nearly seven years ago, you see," says the woman. "We had gone down to Hampton Court together, and Jack had a fancy we should be taken like this. Rather pronounced, I daresay you think, but then Jack was romantic in those days, and young married couples are given to be a little more demonstrative than is perhaps altogether in good taste. Besides, that was our honeymoon trip, you see, for Jack was very poor then, and could not afford even a tiny establishment like this to take me to, and I was no better off, so I could not help him."

Lucy listens, but it is as if she were in a dream. The full meaning of all has not yet had time to sear her, as it must presently, with its horrible sequence.

"I'm afraid you don't quite comprehend?" says Bella.

Poor Lucy lifts her hand vaguely to her head and strives to collect her thoughts to make some sort of reply.

"Yes," she says, at last, wearily. "You mean that you and—he"—she will not profane Jack's name by uttering it in such conjunction—"were friends—lovers, I mean, some years ago, before I knew him."

It is a sore blow, in her simplicity, to think that Jack should ever have cared for another, but the worst is that he has never told her, never alluded to such a thing. Why—why has he kept it a secret? And why has this woman come to reveal what he has kept hidden from her?

Alas! that she learns all too soon.

"You are really very obtuse, or else an extremely clever actress," Bella resumes, watching her with much the same expression as a cat when playing with its helpless prey. "Did I not speak plainly enough? I said that when that photograph was taken Jack Denville and I were on our honeymoon trip."

"But—but he has married me!" exclaims poor, tortured Lucy, a glimmering of the hideous meaning conveyed in Bella's words forcing itself upon her brain.

"Indeed, but, unfortunately for you," how slowly and with what distinctness the cruel sentence falls from her vindictive lips, "he happens to have gone through the same ceremony with me first, a little more than seven years ago. You, judging from your appearance, at least, can hardly assert that you were his wife before that time."

A moment's pause and then, rising and confronting Bella, Lucy points to the door.

"Go," she cries, her clear, young voice, ordinarily soft and low, ringing with scornful disbelief. "I thought you mad, but now I see you for what you really are, a wicked, cruel woman, trying to wreck my happiness with a base lie, which if I gave credit to would make me unworthy of the love I am proud to have gained, the love of a good, honest man who is incapable of such deceit. Leave the house at once, or I will cry for assistance."

"And expose your own shame, betray the man you profess to love so dearly," hisses Bella. "Do what you please, but first look at this, and then believe in his truth if you can."

Almost unknowing what she does Lucy takes the long strip of paper held out to her.

The first glance tells her what it is. Has she not one precisely similar in a drawer of the little davenport upon which she is resting one hand to steady herself? There lies the certificate of her marriage at St. Pancras Church with John Denville, bachelor, the date some six months old, but here in her hand she holds another in which also his name appears, joined to that of Isabella Morris, and the date—Heaven help her and support her in this hour of sorest need—June 28th, 1870.

A faintness as of death creeps over her. The furniture of the room takes fantastic shapes before her misty vision. She hears as from some far distance the sound of that hateful voice in tones of exulting triumph, and then nature can bear no more, a low moan escapes her as the paper falls from her nerveless fingers and flutters to the floor, her figure sways and droops, then follows a merciful oblivion.

Carelessly whistling, with a heart light and free from the smallest thought of ill, Jack Denville approaches the house he is to find desolate, but suddenly ceases as he stops before the gate, for he sees an unusual sight, the passage gas is still burning.

"What's up?" he mutters, as swinging the gate behind him in two steps he strides along the little strip of path that separates it from the door and inserts his latch key. "Can Lucy be unwell, I wonder? Why, Esther, you up at this time in the morning!" For he has come upon the servant sitting upon the bottom stair, and as she looks up at him, her eyes swollen and red with weeping, his heart gives a great thump against his chest. "What is the matter?" he continues. "Your mistress, is she ill?"

"Oh, sir, no, worse?"

"Worse! what do you mean? Here, out of the way; let me go up and see."

He is past her and half way up the stairs before her voice reaches him again and brings him to a stop incredulous of what he hears.

"It's, it's no use, sir," sobs the girl, "you won't find her."

"Not find her?"

"No, she's gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir, with the lady."

Jack slowly descends again, with the feeling upon him that he must be in a dream.

"Missus left a note for you, sir," continues Esther. "It's on the parlour table. She said good bye to me, and that she wasn't coming back any more."

He goes in, Esther following him to turn up the gas, and there upon the table he sees an envelope directed to himself.

Its contents are brief, almost illegible, but at last he contrives to read Lucy's farewell words, for that is what they are.

"I FORGIVE you," she has written, "for though you have been so cruel to me I cannot forget that I have loved you. Your true wife has been

here and told me all. Good-bye, and never attempt to see me again."

"My true wife!" he repeats, like one in a dream. "What horrible delusion—Ah!"

With a cry that is almost a groan he discovers that the envelope holds another sheet of paper, on which is written in bold, flowing characters that he remembers only too well these lines:

"CAN you recall the last words I spoke to you? Let me bring them to your memory if it fails you. I said then that some day, if ever I could find the means, I would strike such a blow at you as would make you feel in some measure that a woman's hate when once aroused is equal to her love. You cast me off, perhaps I deserved it in your eyes, but I did love you then, and I swore to be avenged. I have waited a long time for the chance, and now it has come. It won't last long, I daresay, for no doubt you'll find your new toy ready enough to forgive and forget, but at least I shall have the pleasure, and it is one to me, of knowing that for a time, if only a short one, I have made you as miserable as I wish I could ensure your being for the rest of your life. BELLA."

Jack's eyes blaze with indignant fury, and from between his clenched teeth issues a mighty oath that makes his one hearer shrink back aghast at what she considers, and not without reason, its profanity.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaims.

"Ay, my girl. It's a wicked thing to say. isn't it?" Jack answers, grimly. "But I mean it."

"Oh, sir, you shouldn't!"

"Possibly, but I do, and Heaven help the fiend—I cannot call her a woman—who drove my darling from me to despair, for no mercy will I show her."

CHAPTER IV.

MORNING—LIGHT.

It is scarcely dawn, for it is early springtime yet and the day does not break till late, when Jack Denville, haggard and dishevelled, with pale, drawn, rigid features, halts in front of the house in Guildford Street from which but a short half-year ago he led Lucy Norton a bride.

At first, without any clue to guide him as to her probable movements, for the few lines she had left behind her furnished none, and all that Esther could tell him was that her mistress left the house on foot and alone about half an hour after the departure of her visitor, which took place, so the girl said, before eight o'clock—and stunned, bewildered as he was to such an extent as to render him incapable of sustained thought, Jack, whose first impulse was to leave the house, wandered aimlessly hither and thither from four o'clock till after five before the most natural solution entered his head.

Without other acquaintances in the wide world of London, whither should his poor, friendless darling fly for refuge save to the only house she had known so long? True, if she was bent resolutely upon avoiding him she might seek some obscure shelter, but how?

She had no means with her, of that he assured himself beyond all doubt, for her porte-monnaie with what he knew must be all that remained to her out of her housekeeping money, Jack found upon the drawers.

Her watch and chain too, each little trinket he had given to her, he discovered she had left behind her, even—and that gave him the bitterest pang of all—the plain gold circlet which a cruel lie made her believe she had no longer a right to wear was lying with the rest.

It was evident that beyond the clothes she wore she had left the house perfectly destitute. What then could she do?

Only one thing was probable or possible. Mrs. Parsons, her dead aunt's former landlady, and his, had loved the gentle girl, and surely it would be to her that Lucy would go in her trouble and despair.

If it should not be so!

But no. Jack would not contemplate such a hideous probability. He would find her there, he was sure he should, and feeling in his waistcoat pocket for the wedding-ring and keeper he had placed there, resolved that they should not be long absent from their proper resting-place, he starts for his long walk back to town. He had been rather tired a little while ago, but now excitement bears him up and he feels the distance no more than if it was but a few minutes' walk. He cannot get over the ground though quickly enough for his impatient desire, but no welcome night cab comes to his assistance, and it is yet too early for others to have made their appearance in the empty streets.

At last he is there, and with a beating heart lifts the knocker. There is a slight delay before the door opens, during which he suffers an agony of suspense, but the first words uttered by Mrs. Parsons, who herself admits him, relieves him of his worst fears.

"Oh, Mr. Denville, I am so glad!" cries the good old lady. "She has been calling for you ever since it happened. I sent down to the office, but you had left. What does it all mean?"

"Another time—another time, Mrs. Parsons," he answers, hastily, but with a great rush of joy to his heart. "I cannot explain now. Where is she? I must go to her at once."

"In her own old room, Mr. Denville. Stop—stop," she goes on, nervously, as he is passing hurriedly by her. "You mustn't go up yet."

"Why not?"

"The doctor is there."

"The doctor?"

"Yes, she was took ill, poor lamb, directly after she came, and—you must bear up, Mr. Denville, and try not to be disappointed—the baby, of course, so long before its time—"

"Yes—yes, I understand," hurriedly breaks in Jack.

He will be disappointed no doubt by-and-bye, but at present there is no room for any other feeling in his breast than alarm for Lucy.

"I must see her at once. At least I may go to the door."

And he does so, to meet just coming out a stout-built little man, whose round features betoken joviality, but there is little appearance of such about him now.

On the contrary, he has a very grave look on his face, and when Jack explains who he is and asks whether he may not be allowed to see his wife, the doctor replies that he would like to have a few words with him first, and they go into an adjoining room for that purpose.

And there, gently, but holding out no hope that any other verdict is possible, the doctor tells Jack Denville that he has arrived only in time to look his last upon his wife.

"Nothing can do her harm or good now," says the little man, who, used as he is to the sight of misery, thinks he has never in his life before seen its profoundest depths so plainly expressed as on Jack's features now. "I can hardly understand it, for the lady appears in perfect bodily health, and I can only account for the sad result in one way. She must have sustained some very severe mental shock."

"Ay," groans Jack, "the cruellest, and all my doing."

Then, how he knows not, he finds himself within the room where Lucy lies, white as the sheet that covers her, but sensible and free from pain.

Her eyes brighten as he approaches her with heavy, stumbling step, and she puts her hand feebly out and lets it rest upon the head he bows beside her.

"I'm glad I've seen you once again before I die, Jack," she says, tenderly. "There can be no wrong in it now, and I have thought, dear, that after all you did not mean to work me such a wrong—that you were deceived yourself."

"Deceived, no, Lucy," and he lifts his drawn face and looks into hers with such an agony of pain and self-reproach. "I have wronged you in nothing save that I withheld a knowledge from you, thinking to spare you pain, which had you

possessed that fiend in human shape would have had no power to harm you."

"Hush, hush!" she says, soothingly. "You must not speak of your wife like that, Jack, however she has wronged you."

"My wife! That tie was severed between us years ago. I tell you truth, my darling. Severed legally. You are my wife."

A flash of joy illumines the dying girl's face, but fades away as she answers him.

"Ah! if it were only so, I should die content then only for leaving you. But I saw the proof, she showed it me."

"Lucy, listen. It was not so. You saw the evidence of my marriage with one whose worthlessness, hidden from me before, I soon afterwards discovered, whose life even when she bore my name was so openly notorious that the law set me free from her. I should have told you—I should have told you," he wails, "but I was ashamed of that past time, and knowing myself free, thinking she was gone out of my life for ever, kept the only secret I have ever had from you. Can you forgive me, seeing what it has brought upon you?"

"Forgive you!" she replies, "ah! is it not I should ask forgiveness that I doubted you? Thank Heaven for this mercy shown to me, that I may not die wronging you in my heart. Ah, Jack—dear Jack! it is worth suffering to feel such after joy."

Then for a little while she talks to him, slowly and with an effort, for she is sinking fast, and presently begins to wander a little.

"Do you know, Jack," she says, smiling, while his heart is high bursting with the great anguish which gnaws at it, "I had such a strange fancy, that you were parted from me, that they said we didn't belong to each other, and—and, I forget now, but I want something—something I have lost, I can't remember what. What is it, Jack?"

He sees her feeling the fingers of her left hand and guesses. How thankful he is now that he brought it with him as he quietly slips the missing ring upon her finger.

She is quieter then, and her memory seems to come back.

"You must promise me one thing, Jack," she says.

But she will not tell him what that is until he has lain his hand in hers and vowed most solemnly to obey whatever her request may be.

Then she goes on:

"Do not think of punishing that poor creature. Ah, dear, I see your face, but you have promised me remember. She did not mean to do so much harm most likely. Only to give me a fright perhaps, and cause you some annoyance, not a great pain like this."

And so the moments fly, each one bringing nearer the inevitable end, till suddenly a ray of sunlight breaks in through the folds of the curtain and falls upon the pillow about Lucy's head, surrounding it as with a halo.

She smiles, a glorious smile such as an angel might wear.

"Don't forget me, Jack," she murmurs, "and don't grieve overmuch that we are parted. I am going out of darkness into the light, some day for you to follow me. I'm sorry to leave you too, but it must be. Good bye, my poor old boy. I wish we could go together."

A long, long pause; then the last words she speaks on earth:

"Poor Jack!"

Poor Jack indeed! and yet not poor in all, for has he not the remembrance of that sweet, loving nature to console him?

A remembrance that he will be ever faithful to. Alone and loveless now and henceforth his path lies through the world. Nevertheless will smile of woman have power to win response, or even for a moment banish the shadow that rests upon his face, so sad and grave. Yet does he not mourn as one without hope, for when the call which all must obey shall come to him he trusts to meet again with her whose last thought was of him.

NOBLE AT LAST;

OR,

THE HEADSMAN OF ROUEN.

(AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.)

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EXECUTIONER'S HOME.

Six months have again passed away since the incidents narrated in the last chapter. Six swift, bright, golden months from the time that our hero received the blissful assurance of his wife's undivided love! and they had been months of uninterrupted happiness for the pair, at first so mismatched, it would have seemed, yet finally proving to be so harmoniously blended in all the relations that constitute conjugal joy and contentment.

Gaultier and his wife are once more sitting in the same tapestried room that witnessed the stormy interview described in the last chapter. There is a third now in the family group, a robust, noble boy of two months, who already betrays a striking resemblance to his father's features, though possessing his mother's delicate blonde complexion and hair.

The child is on Gabrielle's knees, while Gaultier bends over him with eyes that sparkle with fatherly pride and love.

"Ah, my little Gaston!" he murmurs, fondly touching the infant's soft cheek with his finger; "shall you grow up to reproach your father for having again resigned his vocation as Headsman of Rouen? Shall you blame him for once more relinquishing his only means of opening a noble's high career to you?"

"Dear Gaston, he will be no son of ours should he live to thus reproach you for persevering in a noble course!" said Gabrielle, with an uplifted glance to her husband as tender as even her baby could have won from her. "I only hope that this time the dauphin's influence will not be exerted to hinder your resignation. It is so noble in you to thus persist in resigning your place and with it the ambition that has so long been your guiding star. Ah, my beloved, you are already nobler than the noblest knight in France in the eyes of your wife!"

He kissed her tenderly, and remained for some time feasting his eyes upon her loveliness, while the infant Gaston still crowed and leapt under his playful but half-listless touch.

Gaultier has himself much changed under the influence of his married happiness; his manner has softened, his dark, sternly-cut features grown more impressive to the emotions of the moment, and his piercing eyes become gentler and dreamier; but, scarcely conscious of the change in himself, he is never weary of contemplating that which conjugal and maternal love has wrought in Gabrielle.

Always peerlessly beautiful, she now seems a hundred times more so. Maternity has ripened her to perfection; and when, as now, she holds her baby to her bosom, there spreads over her brow, her cheeks, her bust, a gleam of something that would fill the ideal of any painter in the world.

It is an unexceptionable truth, that the brightest beauty is the expression of a contented soul and a noble disposition. Gabrielle has become thus beautified. Self-admiration is no longer known to her. Love, all-absorbing, holy love, has shed around her its transforming light, and transfigured the lovely girl into the angelic woman. She is happy in her husband, in her infant, and in the steadfast fulfilment of her duties to them both.

"Dear Gabrielle," said Gaston, after gazing a long time tenderly upon her face without speaking, "what have I done to deserve your admiration? True, I resign the guiding star of ambition, but only to follow the far more brilliant guiding star of thy dear love, and in the interest of humanity and right. But, like you,

I do not understand the reason for this long delay in accepting my resignation."

"And you have received no notice from Prince Louis or the king?"

"None."

"And yet a strange courier brought you some sort of tidings yesterday?"

"True; but not from the court." And Gaultier's happy brow was slightly darkened as he spoke.

Gabrielle coloured. She did not like that he should have any confidence apart from her, and yet hesitated at seeming unduly inquisitive.

Her husband divined her feelings, and presently said, with some signs of disturbance:

"I did not tell you the tidings brought by yesterday's courier because I feared they might cause you anger and distress."

"But have they not caused you both anger and distress?"

"Yes, I cannot deny it. There are degrees and depths of ingratitude that pass all forbearance—all charity."

His voice was stern, and the cloud deepened on her brow.

"Yes, it is better that you should share even this with me, Gabrielle," he added, after another pause. "That is, if you feel equal to it?"

"Equal to share any grief or sting that comes to you, my husband? What a question!"

"Forgive me, then, for having concealed it from you thus far," said he, collecting himself.

"Know, then, Gabrielle, that the courier was from Burgundy, and his message from the agent I secretly sent there some time ago."

"Ah!"

"I have already partly explained my object in sending to Burgundy," Gaultier went on.

"It was to effect the transfer of my valuable personal property—which, with the exception of this house and its appointments, constitutes nearly the whole of my large fortune—to Burgundian soil, in that I might seek a comfortable asylum there, should it prove that I have incurred the lasting and bitter displeasure of the dauphin in thus persistently braving his will concerning the resignation of my employment here."

"Yes."

"Though Burgundy and France are not yet at war, the clash of arms must soon arise, and, safely havened there in Philip the Good's dominions, we could bid defiance to even Prince Louis's enmity."

"Well, has your agent failed?"

"Nay, he has done well; the transfers are effected; and even now the chief part of my wealth is safely infested there."

"What, then, were his dark tidings that have so distressed you?"

"Merely that there is one even now in favour at Duke Philip's court who never ceases to revile me to him. Divining my secret intentions of flying thither, should necessity urge, he uses every means in his power to have me denied the ducal protection that could alone render my dwelling there agreeable."

"What detractor is this? Name him to me, Gaston!" exclaimed Gabrielle, already partaking of his indignation.

"His name? It is a synonym for such foul, base ingratitude you'll scarce believe it!"

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Gabrielle; "you surely would not name——" She hesitated, with a look of wild inquiry.

"Ay, Bertrand de Chanzy, and none other!" said her husband, gloomily.

With flashing eyes and angry cheeks Gabrielle at once burst into such an uncontrollable indignation over what she heard that the babe in her arms set up affrighted cries, and, for the moment, she willingly resigned it to the nurse, who at that moment came running into the room.

"What! Bertrand, indeed!" she cried, when once more alone with her husband. "And is he still mad? Or has forgetfulness—ingratitude—distorted all his nature, once so chivalrous and true, that he would dare repay you, Gaston, with such venomous shafts, shot from the safe retreat he owes to you?"

"You know, dear love, I am not wont to speak

of favours granted at my hand," said Gaultier, with more of sadness than of anger now. "But when I think of what he owes to me, when he so ill-deserved it—how I wrought, connived, and bribed to set him free from prison hereat risk of confiscation, death, disgrace unto myself, in case of my detection—how at last I plucked him out, just on his trial—eve that would have meant his speedy condemnation to the block beneath my axe whose final stroke had won me my ambition's shining goal—and how I speeded him upon his flight with money and with horses under Raoul's guidance, unto Duke Philip's friendly borders—oh, when I think of this, and more beside, I fain would still believe him mad, or wrought and irresponsible! But I cannot deem him so. For Raoul said the chevalier, though moody and morose, was fast recovering both strength of mind and frame what time he reached the frontier, and the good Baptiste, my agent there in Burgundy, reports him also hale and strong."

"And once I thought I loved that man!" murmured Gabrielle. "Marvellous! And yet I cannot but think that he's distraught. No matter, my dear Gaston I will think no more of such as he," she added, looking tenderly again into her husband's face. "Yet, if he were once more in your power?"

"Then I should not again forgive him, Gabrielle," said Gaston, with something of the old hardness returning to his noble face. "Forgiveness, charity and the name of Bertrand de Chanay are no longer associated in my thoughts."

"And I would think you weak, indeed, to tempt again his base ingratitude," said Gabrielle. "Come; this sweet and spring-like air should call us to the garden."

He willingly accompanied her, for his feelings had been more deeply outraged than he had betrayed, and he was in need of her soothing words and presence.

When they had seated themselves in a little, open summer-house near the gate a stoutly-built young man, of lowering and sinister features, looked through the bars, as though casually while sauntering along the street, and then paused upon perceiving them.

He made a low obeisance, which might have contained a tinge of mockery, but after exchanging the courtesies of the day with Gaultier said, very respectfully:

"Fine tidings from Paris, monsieur, and some that ought to make fresh work, ere long, for you professionals at least!"

"What news do you speak of, Tristan?" said Gaultier, coldly. "I have heard of none."

"That's because you bury yourself!" cried the other. "War is declared. The Burgundians fly to arms; all France is in the field. Prisoners already have been taken—some of them discontented Frenchmen too; which means, of course, short shrift for them, thick-throating scoundrels, and the axe, the block! Oh, monsieur! business, business; we will not die of ennui any more!"

He rubbed his hands chucklingly as he spoke, but as Gaultier vouchsafed no answer save a freezing stare, he grew confused and passed along the street, muttering to himself.

"What an evil, cruel face!" said Gabrielle, with a look of disgust.

"What, you have never seen the nightmare knave before?" said her husband. "'Tis Tristan Coupe-Jarret, as he is mostly called; a vicious and ambitious knave, who long has envied me my office. Perhaps he hopes to succeed me some day."

"Would it were his at once!" said Gabrielle. "His face and figure would become it better than yours."

"But not his disposition."

"How?"

"Much as I hate my office, Gabrielle," said Gaultier, thoughtfully, "it is not one to relegate to savage and perfidious hands. Tristan, yonder, would carve a bloody niche in fame, should his ability and inclinations find but sway. He yet may make his mark in France."

His wife sat wondering at the melancholy thoughtfulness of his words, though neither she nor he could be aware of the sombre forecast that had lurked in them. How could they have

surmised that, the nicknamed, obscure wretch who had just left them could one day be linked in history with Louis XI., as the latter's dreaded and cruel favourite, Tristan l'Hermite, Provost Marshal of France? Yet this and more than this was preparing behind the veil of Destiny.

Gabrielle was about to break the silence by asking her husband concerning the war rumours that had been received, when she was forestalled by Raoul, who suddenly made his appearance at the gate, with the intelligence that a courier was galloping toward the house, whose livery was that of a page of the dauphin's household.

(To be Continued.)

HER FUTURE.

(A LOVE STORY.)

"FRANCIA, I don't like that fellow."

"I don't know which fellow you do like, mother," with an embarrassed little laugh. "I think you don't like any of them too well."

"Perhaps not. I hope not. And yet I have my choice among those I know, and it is not Rus Phillips."

The speaker was a woman past fifty—a woman with angular knees and bony hands, with set lips and hollow black eyes.

She might have been smooth-browed and loving-eyed once, but a lifetime of work, of saving and managing and "making out," a life of biting economy and unremitting effort to maintain her worldly position, had done its work upon her. Old and sick and sharp, she uttered her uncompromising verdict.

It was the close of an autumn afternoon. The mother and daughter had brought their sewing to the front windows of the little cottage where they lived, in order to take advantage of the fading light.

The white curtains were drawn aside, and only the straggling, withered woodbine screened their view of the village street. It was a comfortable room they occupied, though with only a common carpet on the floor, turkey-red pillows upon the couch, and chintz-covered chairs; all scrupulously neat, if homely, and bearing witness along with the bony hands and hollow eyes, to Susan Blake's indomitable industry and thrift.

Upon the wall, around the frames of a few commonplace pictures, were twined wreaths of fluff clematis and glowing bitter-sweet. That was Francia's work, of course; the little touch of grace and beauty she found time to add to homeliness about her.

You would know at once that Francia had no part with the homely things of life. She was so pretty—oh, so delightfully pretty; so small-boned and delicately curved, with such abundant light-brown hair, and white-lidded, pansy-coloured eyes; so dainty and soft and prettily coloured. However did such a woman as Susan Blake come to possess a daughter like Francia?

Well, that brings us to a point. Francia belonged to Mrs. Blake only by adoption. The adoption was an incomprehensible event in itself, for when Mrs. Blake buried, years before, one after another, the sickly babies which fell to her share, it seemed a relief; and when she buried her rather unthrifty husband that seemed a relief also.

She was one of the sort, folks said, who get on best alone. And yet, right in the face of this conclusion, she went off one day to an orphan asylum in a neighbouring city and came home with a winsome little three-year-old girl.

"I have taken her for my own," she said, and nobody asked any further questions.

Mrs. Blake owned the little cottage where she lived with a half-acre of ground free of encumbrance; and with what she grew in the garden and earned by her needle she managed

to live independently, and "as good as anybody."

No one dreamed of disputing that. She subscribed to the minister's salary, and entertained the sewing-circle, and sent quinces and patchwork to the county fair. What more would you ask?

Francia's origin accounts, of course, for her name. Mrs. Blake would never have christened a child Francia. However she accepted baby and name together, and never appeared to regret her bargain.

Sometimes, doubtless, the child bothered her, but as her aprons grew short and her blonde hair grew long, Mrs. Blake conformed herself with the idea that some time Francia would repay her for all she had cost. And in a very autumn Francia was seventeen.

They had been sewing in silence in their window seats—Francia was a neat sewer—when the sound of passing wheels attracted their glance to the quiet street. It was Deacon Warner's newly-painted waggon, and his young horse going by, bringing a load of purchases from the city for the store.

And Rus Phillips was driving. He looked toward the windows and nodded—nodded a little patronisingly—and jerked his reins and urged forward his horse, with an important air.

A bright flush stained Francia's pretty face, and she stitched rapidly. Her mother pushed her glasses above her eyes, and her work lay in her lap.

"Francia, I don't like that fellow," she said.

Francia tried to laugh it over. She was nervous at the thought of any serious talk concerning Rus Phillips, but it was Mrs. Blake's will to speak now.

"I have my choice among those I know, and it is not Rus Phillips," she concluded.

Poor Francia, she knew this before she wastold.

"Why don't you like him, mother?" she asked, frankly. It was the one opinion in the world for which she would have asked her mother's reasons.

"I suspect him some ways. I know he's selfish, and I believe he's tricky. He goes against me."

"The deacon thinks he's the best assistant he ever had in his store," said Francia, frankly.

"I ain't saying but what he's smart enough in certain ways, but there's something in them black eyes of his that shows a mean streak."

"Mother," gasped Francia, "don't you think that's a little unfair?"

She stitched away, though her eyes were blinded with tears.

"I don't know that I do. He's been waiting on you pretty steady for six months. Has he ever said anything particular about his intentions?" as if that clinched her suspicion.

"Not yet," murmured the girl.

"And didn't he walk off from meeting with that girl that's visiting at Mr. Cutter's, Sunday afternoon, without taking the slightest notice of you?"

"I didn't think anything of that. Mrs. Cutter called him for something and Angelina held right on to him. I saw how she did it. She's just as bold as she can be—Rus says so," excitedly.

"I hate to hear a girl defend a fellow for walking over her," said Mrs. Blake, with asperity.

Francia was silent. Her tears were dropping on her work.

"Come here, child. You're only seventeen, and you're a loving, trusting little creature, if ever there was one. I ain't going to stand by and see you throw yourself away on Rus Phillips."

Francia had pushed a stool beside her mother's chair, and, seating herself, had buried her face in her lap.

"I love him," she sobbed. "It would kill me to give him up."

Mrs. Blake had begun to stroke her hair, but she withdrew her hand.

"People aren't killed so easy," she said. "And it appears to me, Francia, that I have some right to a say. I haven't brought you up

thinking you were going to disobey me before you'd hardly got your growth."

"I wouldn't disobey you in—anything—else," said the girl, sobbing.

Mrs. Blake was silent a minute.

"Does that mean that you have decided to disobey me in this?"

"Oh, mother, I know you wrong him! And I—I could never love anybody else."

"You'd better wait till he asks you before you talk quite so free about loving, Francia Blake. I didn't think you were so simple. But, now we are on the subject, I might as well say what's on my mind. I haven't got long to live, and it's my business to think about what's to come after I'm gone. There, you needn't have hysterics. You've been a good child to me. I believe you love me, and I think you'll mourn for me, but that isn't the point. I'm thinking about who's to take care of you when I'm gone. I've only this little home to leave you, and I can't leave you this, except you take Abiah Braman along with it. It reverts to him by will. Well, he wants you, Francia, and he's a good man. Now I've never hinted this before. I was afraid of making a muddle. But I see it's time I did. Abiah seems old to you. I suppose, at thirty. And he seems grave. I don't understand, for my part, what a great, strong, sensible man like him wants of such a useless little pink-and-white morsel as you. But he does, and he's the man for you to marry. Now, Francia, don't go wasting any tears on that excoomb of a Phillips. Abiah only needs a word of encouragement to go down on his knees to you. And he's what you need, Francia—someone that's tender and strong and true; and that's what Abiah Braman is, if there are any such."

"Oh—oh—I—couldn't—never—never!" Francia burst out.

Mrs. Blake thrust her away from her knee. She had made her plea almost humbly. She had offered this homeless, helpless girl what seemed to her as fair a lot as could be offered to a woman.

She had no sympathy, not a particle, with this silly lovesickness. But she was not a woman to harp on a subject. She had spoken. It must suffice. She felt impatient that Francia should impose upon her the burden of compelling her to do what was best for herself. All the same, she meant to compel her at the proper time if she could.

Mrs. Blake did not believe that Rus Phillips wanted to marry Francia. He wanted to fool with her and amuse himself, doubtless; but he would be a good deal more likely to marry one of the Warner girls, and so help himself to a partnership in the deacon's prosperous store; or this niece of Mrs. Cutter's, with her city accomplishments and her dashing ways—if Susan Blake read him aright.

"Put your work away, and let's us have an early tea," she said. "And then you may go to see Miss Stone, and get the patterns she promised me."

Francia started on her errand in a very unhappy frame of mind—the most wretched of her short life. That her mother disapproved of Rus was bad enough, but it was a great deal worse that she should doubt him; worse still because Francia herself had at certain times her own little jealous misgivings concerning his conduct.

If Rus loved her she could bear anything. But, now that she had betrayed herself, what if he did not love her?

And Francia walked laggingly along the roadside in the frosty yellow dusk, a very wretched girl.

Whether for good or for ill, however, Russell Phillips was at that very hour on the point of declaring his love. He had been to the city that day, and he had brought home something beside fresh spices and autumn specialities. He had brought home a piece of news which interested him vastly, and this was that a company of business men proposed to put up some summer residences at Blackmoor the following season, and furthermore that some of the sites selected were in the vicinity of Widow Blake's

cottage. The news had come to him quite by accident, and it had set him thinking.

Mrs. Blake's blindless, paintless little place happened to stand upon a knoll. There were two or three fine old trees also upon her half-acre. Knolls and trees had money's worth, under certain circumstances.

Rus Phillips dreamed dreams. A pretty girl like Francia, who was heir to a saleable bit of property, was no bad investment. He saw Deacon Warner's store enlarged and thronged with summer customers—himself at the head of the establishment; and then, conscious that he was no favourite with the old lady, as he put it, and that it was possible Francia might have been annoyed by his attentions to Angelina Cutter, he resolved to settle matters without delay.

While Francia, therefore, was gone upon her errand to Miss Stone, Rus in a most conciliating and prepossessing state of mind was tapping at the cottage door. Mrs. Blake opened it, lamp in hand.

"Francia is out this evening," she said, curtly.

"Mrs. Blake, I should be glad of a little talk—if it is convenient—with you," blandly.

She did not move away from the door as he expected. She simply paused to pick her words before replying, throwing the lamplight, as well as she could, in his face.

"It isn't convenient. I don't know as it will ever be convenient for me to hold much talk with you, Rus Phillips."

"I am sorry. I had hoped—"

"There is nothing for you to hope for here."

"Oh, Mrs. Blake," with the insinuating smile with which he had learned to parody criticism upon the articles dispensed at the village store, "I should think I was an unlucky fellow if that were true. Your daughter—"

"My daughter will do as I say. And I say that she shan't listen to any love-making from you. Now we understand each other. Good evening."

And Mrs. Blake ended this undiplomatic interview by closing the door.

Rus Phillips was popular and conceited. The girls called him "awful handsome," and everyone agreed that he had a taking way. Never in his life had he been so snubbed. He stood feeling very awkward and stupid with the door shut in his face for an instant, and then, turning, he espied Francia coming slowly along toward home. He stepped quickly to meet her; not before she had taken in the scene and divined what had occurred.

"Oh, Rus," she gasped, breathlessly, setting down the parcel, and pausing at the corner of the fence.

"Your mother has been good enough to shut the door in my face, Francia."

"She is ill, and she is so queer. I am sure she did not mean it," lied Francia, in desperate apology.

"I think she meant it," rather appeased by her distress, "and all I want to know now is whether she can set you against me?"

Francia shook her head vigorously.

He took the little bare hand covered by the shawl and stood close beside her.

"You care a little for me then, Francia?" By George, I think I care most too much for you to stand such treatment."

"Oh, Rus, forgive her, please forgive her, and I will beg her on my knees—"

"No; that won't do any good. She is set against me, Heaven knows why. I shall never offer to enter her house again. But that needn't divide us, Francia—need it?"

She began to cry. Rus liked her to cry. It gave him a sense of power. Not that he doubted his power over little, soft, loving Francia, but he enjoyed the reassurance of seeing her suffer. He drew her closer, and took her, sobbing and tearful, in his arms, and stroked the soft hair, and stooped and kissed her, and held her tight as he whispered:

"No matter, darling. We love each other. I don't care for what your mother does so long as you love me."

Then Francia cried still harder, and elung a

little closer to the strong arm about her waist, and hid the hot, wet face which had been kissed against Rus's shoulder; at which he only pressed his lips to her throat and hair, and said, tenderly, between the kisses:

"Mr little Francia—isn't it? And nobody can take her away from me."

"Oh! what shall I do? what shall I do?" murmured Francia, her sobs sending little thrilling quivers through her body strained against his own.

"It will all come out right. Your mother will try to keep us apart, but we'll see each other sometimes like this," and Rus thought it was a very good arrangement on the whole, for, as everyone knew, the Widow Blake was in a decline, and as soon as Francia was left alone he would be ready to step in and take care of her. "We will see each other when we can—like this," he repeated, loosening his pretty Francia, lifting her face from its hiding-place, stroking her velvety cheek, kissing her eyelids, and gathering her close in his arms again.

The sound of a door shut sharply within the cottage disturbed them.

"I must go," whispered Francia, starting away, and unconsciously lifting her face to the frosty air with the hope of cooling its telltale blushes.

Mrs. Blake, however, paid no especial heed to her appearance. She set her to cut out some patterns, while she herself went into her bedroom and busied herself, as she had a fashion of doing, looking over her bureau drawers, smoothing and rearranging the garments which were ready, as she said, against a time of need.

The employment to-night was rather a subterfuge. She was a good deal excited by what had occurred, and she wanted to be alone.

"I have fretted to think I could not leave the place to her outright. Dear knows, I have fretted," she said to herself, "and now I see it is just as well. I've worked for her and cared for her, and loved her a little better than ever I loved anything else, and she throws me over for the first jackanapes with red cheeks and a flashy necktie that comes in her way. Well, I'll keep them apart so long as I'm above ground, and I can't help what comes after."

She sat and rocked herself nervously, and her hands trembled and the tears came into her hollow eyes. Her life was going out like so many other defeated, lonesome lives that have striven and striven and never reached what they sought.

And meanwhile Francia, in the warm, bright kitchen, let the scissors slip through her fingers, while she relived the events of the last hour, and abandoned herself to her exquisite happiness. Her mother was all wrong about Rus. She had suspected him of merely fooling with her, whereas, as Francia herself had well known, he loved her devotedly. And as to Angelina Cutter—if the thought of Rus's attentions had disturbed her once they would never disturb her again after what had happened.

The bright autumnal season was over. The rains set in; the winter work pressed, and Mrs. Blake was poorly. Francia had few opportunities for meeting her lover. He walked home from church with her on Sunday afternoons, as long as she was able to attend, and Francia lived upon the memory and anticipation of this event. It so grieved her loving little heart, though, to be going against her mother that the interviews had their drawbacks.

"I couldn't do it, Rus, if I was not certain that mother would have judged you differently when she was well. She is peculiar about a good many things, and this is one of them."

For some reason, or perhaps without reason, for there was very little of calculation in Francia's character, she never told Rus about the will which gave Mrs. Blake the use of the cottage during her life, and then made it revert to Abiah Braman, a kinsman of Rufus Blake's. And he, seeing it distressed Francia to make plans founded on her mother's death, talked a good deal of the present and little of the future.

After New Year Mrs. Blake was forced to give up work. Francia nursed her lovingly with



[AT THE GARDEN GATE.]

very little help, except when toward the last Abiah Braman brought his maiden sister from the adjoining town, where they lived, and left her there, seeing that Francia was pale and thin.

"You won't mind if Jane stops a while to help Francia, shall you, Aunt Susan?" he asked.

"No; I shan't mind. But she's got no cause to look after the sheets and quilts. Everything will go to you just as I leave it. As for the spoons and the china teaset, they were mine, and I've given them to Francia."

"Jane and I will be as tender of Francia as you could, Aunt Susan," said the young man, not liking to put his thought more explicitly.

The sick woman shook her head.

"Folks can't tell just what they will do till they've tried."

Abiah felt quite convinced as to what he should do, if he had the chance. But his sister, who was present, sounded Francia as to her intentions next time they were alone.

"I don't know what 'Biah'll do with the place," she said; "of course while he holds it you'll be welcome to stay, only you can't very well stay alone. And I've heard some hints that there were parties from the city who would pay a good price for this very spot."

"I shall be able to do for myself when mother don't need me any more," Francia said, a little loftily.

"Well, yes, I suppose so," answered Jane

Braman. "They say you've got a taste for dressmaking. I didn't know but you might like to go into Maria Stone's shop and learn the trade."

"I might, if it was necessary," said Francia, in a rather mysterious tone.

"If ever I saw a useless bit of prettiness, it's this girl that Aunt Susan Blake has brought up," Miss Braman said one day to her brother. "I've tried to talk with her about her future, but she don't seem to have no more concern than a kitten."

"Jane," said Abiah, rather shamefacedly, "I'd be glad to take care of Francia myself if she'd let me."

Jane Braman lifted her hands and dropped them. She was a wise woman, and she uttered no remonstrance.

"If she'd let you? Oh, 'Biah, the woman don't stand on her feet who mightn't be proud to be taken care of by you."

"Do you think there's anybody she's caring about in the village, Jane? You've been here a fortnight. You'd have found out if there was, shouldn't you?"

Miss Braman shook her head.

"I haven't seen anything that would lead me to suppose. And yet—she was amazin' anxious to get to the meeting this snowy afternoon. And—"

They turned their eyes simultaneously down the street as they stood in the sitting-room window, with the withered woodbine rattling with

out, and saw Francia coming, oh, so slowly, toward home, and Rus Phillips, with his red cheeks and black eyes, walking beside her.

Abiah Braman looked pale and grave.

"I saw that fellow over at Hazlewood last week," he muttered, "with another girl. I don't believe he's got any notion after Francia."

"Then it's Francia that's got a notion for him," said Miss Braman, with a short laugh.

The nursing and the watching were over. The garments that had lain in the bureau drawer for a "time of need" were needed, and the Widow Blake's orderly home was ordered afresh for her funeral. It was dreary March weather. There were snow and rain and sleet, leaden skies, and howling winds.

When it was all over poor little Francia lifted her tear-drenched face to confront her future. Rus had been at the funeral. She had seen him, but could not speak to him of course. It seemed almost wrong for him to come as soon as her mother was dead.

Francia, however, had a kind of faith that her mother would see Rus in a different light—from the world where she had gone. She believed it was only her sickness and her "queerness" which had made her regard him as she did. So she reconciled her conscience to Rus coming to the house where he could not come hitherto, and tried to dry her tears and infuse a little cheerfulness into the dreary rooms, in expectation of his visit, while Miss Braman took account of the bedding in the garret, the pickles in the cellar, the very garden seeds upon the wall.

Day after day went by. The evenings, the dark, lonesome evenings, began and ended; a week passed by and Rus Phillips did not come. Francia's pretty little face had a pinched, frightened look.

"She takes Aunt Susan's death harder than I supposed," Miss Braman said to her brother, on the day when he finally came to drive her over home.

"You must come with us and make a visit, Francia," he said. "The change will do you good."

She had a bewildered look.

"I don't know," she answered; "I expected—" She burst out crying. "I really don't know what to do."

"What did you expect?" he asked, tenderly. "I thought Russell Phillips would have been here. I must see him before I can decide on anything," she said. She dried her tears. "I will go and see him now."

"I did not think she could look so plucky," Jane Braman remarked, as the girl went down the street. "I believe there's something in her, after all."

Abiah Braman watched her little swaying figure in the chilly, windy sunshine. His strong brown hand shut and opened mechanically, as though he had its grip upon somebody's throat—perhaps that of Rus Phillips.

Francia walked straight into Deacon Warner's store. It was noontime, and Rus chanced to be there alone. He was writing, and as the little form in its black dress came through the door he looked up in haste and came forward to meet her, with a rather uneasy face.

"Why, Francia, I am glad to see you. I suppose you have wondered—" he began, in the tone he would have used toward any acquaintance, but the blue eyes were flashing in his face in a way which made him uncertain of his ground.

"Yes, I have wondered. And now I have come to know—"

She paused. He could hardly believe it was the clinging blossom of a girl whose indignation he had not thought could hurt a fly.

"You see, Francia, things are a little different from what I supposed. But we are young enough to wait. And I thought maybe if I began visiting you right off, folks would talk more than you would care to have them."

"How are things different?" wonderingly.

"The place is Abiah Braman's—not yours," with hesitation.

"Yes. You did not know it before?"

"No, I did not, Francia."

"I see that makes a difference," slowly.

She was awfully pretty. The little black straw hat was so becoming to the fair hair and apple-blossom skin. He thought he liked her well enough to take her without a penny.

"But we can be just the same to each other—can't we, Francia? I shall come to see you sometimes, you know."

"Jane Braman has asked me to go home with her."

She thought Rus must know that Abiah Braman wanted to marry her. Possibly he would be jealous, and try to keep her from going to his house.

"Perhaps you can't do better for the present," he said, in his patronising way.

"I have decided to go," she answered, choking back her tears. "That is all. I thought I would come and tell you."

"I shall be glad to go home with you for a few weeks, Cousin Jane," she said, quietly, on her return home. "And then maybe the best thing I could do would be to go into the shop and learn dressmaking."

Abiah's heart gave a great leap as he listened.

"Yes, I think it would," said Miss Jane. "I was speaking about you to Maria. She says she couldn't pay you much through the summer, but I told her you had friends that would help you till you could get a start."

Miss Braman had paused in the act of taking up a carpet.

"Abiah has just had a letter," she explained, "from Mr. Leroy. He has concluded to take the place, and wants to begin work the first of April. So we're going to tear up here. You're to have the furniture, bedding and all—Abiah says so—and dear knows we've got enough at home, so we'll box it up and store it away for the present."

At the end of a fortnight's visit Francia had a letter from Miss Stone, saying there was a vacancy in the shop, and would she come and take it?

"The city folks are working lively at their places," the dressmaker wrote. "I think Blackmoor will see different days. I shouldn't wonder if I had a run of custom. Those city women never know when they've got enough clothes, and like as not they'll have me making things for them. I've seen the Mrs. Leroy that's got your old home, and, Francia, she looks for all the world just like you, if you'd lived twenty years longer and seen storms of trouble, and was dressed up in fine clothes."

Abiah drove Francia back to Blackmoor to fill the place Miss Stone offered her. He had been very thoughtful, very kind, during the fortnight she had spent in his house, and she had been so miserable that she had hardly been conscious of his forbearance.

It was a soft, April day that they started upon their drive, a faint blue sky, a faint green earth. Robins hopping in the ploughed fields and rare dandelions in sunny places. It was a long drive, and they talked little, but, a couple of miles before they should come to the end, Abiah said:

"Francia, I have seen that you had trouble, and I haven't wanted to vex you by speaking. But you're going back now—where the trouble is, maybe—and I want to know if there is anything I can do for you about it."

"No one can do anything about it," she said. "I must get over it."

Her sad little voice made his heart ache.

"I would bear it for you if I could. And, Francia, if you don't like the shop work, if you're in any trouble, there's always a place for you with—" he paused. "I mean something more than that. I mean—it comes odd to say what I've lived thirty years without ever saying to a woman—I mean that I would have you for my wife if I could, little Francia, to cherish and take care of for ever."

"Please don't say that. You have been so good. I shall never forget. But I shall never

marry—never care for anybody in that way again, Cousin 'Biah."

He laid his brown hand upon hers and pressed it lightly.

"It seems so, I know. But you are young. I shall wait. Some day, maybe. And if the day comes, you will let me know? You will feel sure that I have not changed, Francia? Tell me you will feel sure."

She turned her eyes to his, and was startled at the quiet pathos and passion of his gaze.

"Yes, I think I shall feel sure."

The words came almost against her will.

Miss Stone found Francia an apt apprentice.

She had her mind on her work, and wasn't for flirting and gadding, like most girls. She had exquisite taste in trimmings, and was so valuable altogether that Miss Stone, driven with her work, did not really notice how pale and fragile she seemed.

With the warm summer days came the visitors, creating quite a revolution in the village. Their phaetons rolled up and down the broad, shady street. They went boating on the little river that ran just outside the village.

The orders they left at the store would have driven the deacon wild, but that Rus Phillips, affable and bland, took the helm and made himself more important than ever. Even Miss Stone, as she had surmised, came in for a share of the patronage.

As for Rus, indeed, so affable and important he was, so good-looking and presuming, that some of the young lady visitors began to notice him, and after a picnic, in which visitors and villagers joined, he began to call at some of the city folks' houses quite familiarly.

There was a Miss Grant, a tall, showy girl, who spent a great deal of money, and whose father's business was not known. Rus and she seemed to get on well together. She drove him about in her phaeton moonlight evenings, and it was said he called pretty often at the house. Miss Grant was among the dressmaker's new patrons. She was always having something retrimmed or refitted.

Mrs. Leroy, whose husband had bought the Blake cottage, was a customer likewise late in the season, when the mornings were cool and she found she needed a quilted wrapper.

It happened one day that Miss Grant was just leaving the work room when Mrs. Leroy came in.

"Miss Grant tells me they are going away next week," commented the dressmaker, with her mouth full of pins. "She says the rest of them have wanted to go to the sea-shore, but she likes Blackmoor so well she hates to leave. I suppose she has her reasons for liking it."

"She seems to have found considerable amusement here," replied Mrs. Leroy.

"I've heard it hinted that she's found a husband," said Miss Stone, who had heard nothing of the kind, and merely wanted to elicit her customer's impressions.

"Indeed? The young man who is employed in the store?" queried the lady.

Neither of them had noticed Francia, who sat measuring some breadths of silk on the board. It had not been possible but some rumours of Rus's new flirtation had reached her; but that the matter had gone so far that it was said he was to be married was a shock. All her self-repression, the strain of work and suffering, revenged itself. She gasped, moaned, and fell fainting on the floor.

Mrs. Leroy helped Miss Stone to lift her on the couch, and loosed her clothes, while others were opening windows and bringing water. In the excitement no one observed the start of surprise with which Mrs. Leroy contemplated the girl, nor the scrutiny with which she lifted a lock of hair from her temple as she lay unconscious.

As Francia began to revive Mrs. Leroy asked for a glass of water and sat down all a tremble. After a moment she said she felt unable to try on her wrapper, and left quite abruptly.

That evening Miss Stone was surprised to re-

ceive a call from Mrs. Leroy, accompanied by her husband.

"That girl who fainted to-day," she said—"I wish you would send her into the room on some pretext and then dismiss her. I would like Mr. Leroy to see her."

Miss Stone complied rather stiffly with this strange request.

"And now, madame," said Mr. Leroy, when Francia had come in and gone out, "where did you get that child?"

"As if," said Miss Stone, in relating the story—"as if I had kidnapped her."

"Well, sir, she's grown up here in Blackmoor, and when her folks were dead she came to me to earn her living," defiantly.

"Who were her folks?" not seeming to notice her defiance.

"She was brought up by Susan Blake—she that owned the place you bought."

"She was Mrs. Blake's daughter?"

"Her adopted daughter, rightly speaking."

"Ah! And from whom did Mrs. Blake adopt her?"

"She adopted her, sir, from where she had a perfect right to adopt her—from the Orphan Asylum at N—"

Mrs. Leroy grasped her husband's arm quickly.

"The orphan asylum," she repeated.

"We are greatly obliged, madame, for your information," said Mr. Leroy. "Fifteen years ago we lost a child—our only child. A nurse, whose ill-will was excited against my wife, took our baby out and disappeared with her. At first we thought she meant only to alarm us and would return. Finally we were forced to the conviction either that the child of which she had robbed us was dead, or that, fearing the consequences of her act, she had resolved never to make herself known. From that time we have never obtained the slightest clue until to-day, when my wife was overcome with the striking resemblance which the young girl in your employ bears our lost child, and, as you must observe, to herself."

"I always noticed that Francia looked like Mrs. Leroy," said Miss Stone.

"Francia! Is her name Francia? My baby's name was Francia Storms Leroy."

"We will visit the asylum to-morrow. It is altogether likely we may be able to satisfy ourselves of the girl's identity."

"To-morrow! Oh! Frank, I am satisfied. I must have my child to-night!"

Mr. Leroy smiled as men smile upon the weakness with which they sympathise, and Francia was recalled to learn the change of fortune which awaited her.

The visit to the asylum was hardly needed to confirm her identity, but it did so completely. The woman, claiming to be her aunt, who had placed her in the asylum, answered the description of the nurse, and the little shoes which Francia had on, and which had been preserved, were recalled by the mother as the very pair worn upon the day when she was lost.

It was all very bewildering to Miss Stone, who was a person of one idea, and when Francia, on leaving for her old and new home, said, "I will finish the skirt, Miss Stone, if you can't get anyone else to do it," she broke down and wept as if she was attending a funeral. The offer touched her tenderest spot.

Everyone came to call of course and talk over the Blackmoor romance, Miss Grant in her travelling dress among the others.

"I have heard a hint that Blackmoor has so many attractions that you could hardly tear yourself away," Mrs. Leroy remarked to this guest, quite unconscious of her dangerous ground.

Miss Grant tossed her plumed hat.

"It is time I went, for people are joking about my driving with that young Phillips till I am ashamed of them and of myself. I thought that you, Mrs. Leroy, might understand that I could

"Break a country heart
For pastime e'er I went to town,

without being harmed by the experiment."

"So it is only that and nothing more?" said Mrs. Leroy.

"It is evident that you have only known Isabel Grant one summer," was the reply.

The Leroy's stayed late at Blackmoor. Mr. Leroy having been a very rich man was no longer so, and had secured this pleasant country home partly as a measure of economy.

It was inevitable that Francis should meet Russell Phillips, and she did so with the quiet dignity which was like a touch of frost to his assurance. He recovered though, for his chagrin at his various mistakes had not altered his good opinion of himself, and one evening he came to call.

Somewhat to her mother's surprise Francis, after being unusually quiet during his stay, followed him into the hall when he was leaving.

"Good night, Mr. Phillips, and good bye," she said, in a low voice. "I never wish to see you here again."

"Francis, have you entirely forgotten the past?"

"On the contrary, I remember every circumstance in it."

"I did not think you were one to change with fortune. Some men in my place would publish their claim upon you," He had the brass to declare.

"You may do so. Your claim on me is like that I once made on you—empty as air—"

"You are hard. You loved me once," with a last effort to regain what he had lost.

"It is that that makes me hard. Good bye."

That night, sitting before the open fire, Francis told her new mother her story. And she dwelt more than she was aware on Abiah Braman as she told it. He had been so tender and so kind. He had exacted nothing and given all.

"My darling, you are still but a child—too young to choose. You must have education—society."

One day Francis and her mother drove over to the Bramans' and spent the day. Francis had never seen Abiah appear so well. He was self-possessed, dignified, intelligent. He compared well with the city folks. The girl thought his brown face handsome. She could never forget how he alone had been tender and forbearing when all the world failed her.

"Little Francis, I suppose I must give up all hope now," he said to her.

She blushed vividly.

"Do you want to hope, 'Biah'?"

"Yes, I want to hope. You know I can't change."

"Well, don't change, 'Biah'."

"And Rus?" he asked, uneasily. "Rus will try to court you now."

She laughed frankly.

"Don't worry about Rus Phillips. He will get as good as he deserves."

FACETIÆ.

A BACHELOR'S TOAST.—Man as I am, and woman as she should be—no encumbrance.

Judy.

THE "LATEST THING OUT."—An old year.

Judy.

A DEFINITION.

EXPLAIN me the word "Detrimental."

By this you may take it is meant all

That army of flirts,

Whose society hurts,

Because without money or rental,

They push through the bars

Of our managing mas,

Wherein their fair treasures are pent all.

Judy.

"TRAMMELS OF THE LAW."—Handcuffs.

Judy.

"DON'T BOIL OVER."

We have all heard of the "music" a kettle makes when it is singing on the fire; but, when it is just beginning to boil, what musical instrument does it put you most in mind of? Well, if you must know, a dull simmer (dulcimer, ha! ha!).

Judy.

HOW RUDE!

"Such a getting up-stairs," as the bad boy said when he caught his sister practising with a pince-nez before the looking-glass.

Judy.

VERY ODD.

It strikes one as being peculiar, not to say a most paradoxical paradox, and yet it would appear un-applely to be quite true, that it was the first pair that ate the first apple.

Judy.

GO ALONG, DO!

ANOTHER "CONSTANT SUBSCRIBER," writing to Mrs. J., wants to know whether, if a duck goes into the water for divers reasons, she comes out again on land for sun-dry purposes? Mrs. J.'s answer is—"Go along do!"

Judy.

WHEN is a butcher like a cripple?—When he's out of joints.

Judy.

THE "LOVE THAT INTOXICATES."—The love of strong drink.

Judy.

THE VOICE OF THE SLUGGARD.—A long yawn.

Judy.

A NOTE AND QUERY.

WIFE (given to literature and the drama): "George, what is the meaning of the expression 'Go to!' you meet with so often in Shakespeare and the old dramatists?"

HUSBAND (not a reading man): "Don't know. I'm sure, dear, unless—Well, p'raps he was going to say—but thought it wouldn't sound proper."

Punch.

AT A SCHOOL FEAST.

TEACHER: "Now, you three little girls, are not you going to sit down and have tea?"

SARAHANN: "No, teacher. We always have late dinner at 'alf past six with par and mar."

Punch.

SEASONABLE ADVICE TO ALL.

SAYS Aaron to Moses,

"I've got trichinosis."

Says Moses to Aaron,

"You shouldn't pork fare on."

Punch.

THE WAY TO RETAIN HEALTH.

YOUNG LADY: "I'm glad to see you looking so well, Mrs. Wickens. You never seem to get any older."

MRS. WICKENS: "Well, miss, you see, I always 'ave 'eld temperance as a blessin' and moderation in drinkin' sperrets a virtue. What I see is as three or four glasses o' gin afore breakfast in the mornin' is as good as a 'undred."

Fun.

FROM THE DESK.—What process in book-keeping is exemplified when young people throw sheep's eyes at one another?—Cross-casting.

Fun.

IN view of the suspected "attitude" of the Fenians, it is proposed to remove all the locks from the Thames and the barrels from the church organs and breweries within the metropolitan area.

Fun.

A PATENT FACT.

NECESSITY is the mother of invention, they say, but seeing how many people ruin themselves by taking out patents, we think that "Invention is the mother of necessity" is the way the proverb should read.

Fun.

THE JUVENILE OFFENDERS' DIFFICULTY.—Keeping their hands from picking and stealing.

Fun.

"THAT IS SO."

AN officer who usually commands a large amount of attention after a period of blunder and disasters.—General Election.

Fun.

VESTRIAL VIRGINS.—Female acolytes.

Fun.

THE FORCE OF EXAMPLE.

SCENE—Nurse bringing in a small boy (crying) to his mother.

NURSE: "Please'm, isn't Master Tommy to go to bed now?"

TOMMY: "No, ma, I don't want to! We're all playing at Parliament in the nursery, and we've arranged to have an all-night sitting, and I'm in charge of the bill. Boohoo!"

Fun.

SPECIAL PLEADERS.

NORAH: "Oh, papa-darling, we wish to know may we order spring dresses, as these are becoming so warm?"

KATHLEEN: "In other words, we wish to relinquish our tenant right in Ulster, but will take Cahir not to adopt expensive plans which we Connaught Kerry out."

[No wonder they carried their point.] Fun.

A "LODE" OF METAL.—A bullet.

Fun.

ESSENCE-IALLY SCOTCH.—Tar-tan-nic acid.

Fun.

A COT INVERSE.

(Rondeau.)

He cut me out! yet I was not a coat,

Nor he a tailor! neither was the act

One that in war is often done by boat,

And in the doing many skulls get

crackt!

Nor was it with some "copy" that he

wrote

Of news I gave him; or an anecdote,

Which otherwise his paper would have

lackt!

Not one of these befell, when thus

attackt,

He cut me out!

My love was with me; and, in point of

fact,

He cut me out with her on whom I

doat!

Ah! she was formed to conquer and

attract,

And I was dumb! my heart was in

my throat!

'Twas by the sea, and 'twas in paper

blackt

He cut me out!

Fun.

A BIT OF COVER.—A piece of pie crust.

Moonshine.

COURTESHIP UNDER THE LAND LEAGUE.

LAND LEAGUE LOVER (to Land League lady) "Before you take my arm, dear, say, oh, say, on which side you carry your revolver?"

Moonshine.

TERRIBLE TRADE PROSPECT.

SCENE—West End Modiste's on the morning after the Regent Street tradesmen's meeting.

MODISTE (to traveller): "What is trade coming to? I'm sure I don't know. Here's Lord Cairns would cut down credit to three years; and, as if that were not bad enough, young Churchill's bill only gives people a year to pay their bills in! Shameful! Why, next, I suppose, we shall have to take ready money."

Funny Folks.

NICE CHILD.

PROFESSOR (angry at inattention): "Another minute, mees, and I shall go speak to your mamma."

PUPIL: "Well, take care pa don't catch you at it, that's all. He's awfully jealous."

Funny Folks.

DOG STARS.—Skye terriers.

Moonshine.

THE FLOUR OF THE FLOCK.—Corn flour.

Moonshine.

CABMAN'S PARADOX.—The worst weather is the farrest.

Moonshine.

THE EXTREME OF HOPE.—The tip-toe of expectation.

Moonshine.

A FIELD PEACE.—An armistice.

Moonshine.

THE SEAT OF WAR.—A camp stool.

Moonshine.

TO BE MADE A NOTE OF.—One of the latest freaks of fashion in Paris appears to be the employment of letter paper of a different colour for every day of the week. We do not think very highly of the plan ourselves; although there can be no question that a packet of such paper would be hues-ful as well as ornamental.

Moonshine.

MIST AND ICE UNIVERSALLY WELCOMED.—**Funny Folks.**

"MARCH OF THE CAMERA MEN."—A procession of travelling photographers.

Funny Folks.

HORTICULTURAL.

WHICH is most completely a "Blighted Flower"—a ball-room "Wallflower" or a "Bankrupt Stock"?

Funny Folks.

ADVICE GRATIS TO OVER-CONFIDENT BOWERS.—"Don't holla before you're clear of the Wood."

Funny Folks.

POULTRY ATTEMPT AT OVA-CHARGING.

LADY: "Have you any eggs at ten a shilling?"

SHOPWOMAN: "Oh, dear no, madame. Our hens won't lay any more at that price."

Funny Folks.

OUR UNFORTUNATE AFRICAN GENERALS.—England's (s)Cape-goats.

Funny Folks.

STATISTICS.

BRITISH COINS IN CIRCULATION.—From carefully prepared statistics it may safely be computed that at the present day there are one hundred and thirty millions sterling of gold coins doing duty in the British Isles; of crowns, 2,320,047; of half-crowns, 41,516,343; of florins, 16,456,220; of shillings, 125,540,160; of sixpences, 82,125,578; of fourpences (possibly), 12,000,000; and of threepences, 17,572,857; or a grand total in round numbers of three hundred millions of silver coins of all denominations. Of bronze coins it is stated that since the institution of the Royal Mint more than six thousand tons have been struck and issued. By far the largest portion of these are in the form of pence and halfpence, although many hundreds of tons of farthings too are in existence. Taking an average of the proportionate number of each variety of the subsidiary coins, it may be safely assumed that there are collectively not less than eight hundred millions of pieces in the pockets and the tills of Her Majesty's lieges at the time of the present computation. From the foregoing statistics it may be gathered—and the gathering may be depended upon—that the aggregate number of current coins of every legitimate kind now in use throughout the United Kingdom is not less than twelve hundred and thirty millions!

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CHESTNUTS.—The French accomplish more with chestnuts than we dream of. They make a soup of them, they ice them, they have them ground to flour and convert them into sweet omelets, creams, and soufflés; the paté de marrons glacée is a delicious delicacy. A simpler process, easily managed at home, is to boil the large Spanish chestnuts until they are soft enough to mash, then beat up the whites of eggs with pounded loaf-sugar and sherry-wine to taste; make a pyramid of the chestnuts, and pour the whip over it.

POTTED CHICKEN.—This is an agreeable relish, and makes a pleasant luncheon when travelling. Take a roast fowl and carve off all the meat. Take two slices of cold ham and chop it with chicken; add to this one quarter pound of the best butter; add salt and pepper to taste; now pound this all together to a

paste; put the mixture in a jam-pot; cover closely. It will keep in a cool place ten days, or long enough for any moderate journey.

FIG PUDDING.—Half a pound of the best figs, half a pound of beef suet, three table-spoonfuls of sugar, half a pound of bread crumbs grated, three eggs, one nutmeg grated. These should be all well mixed together and boiled for four hours, served with wine sauce.

BROILED TRIPE.—Cut up honey-comb tripe into pieces from three to four inches wide; rub a little oil or melted butter over them, dredge them in flour, and broil over a charcoal fire; squeeze a little lemon-juice over each piece and serve. Never broil tripe over a hard-coal fire; the gases arising from the coal spoil the flavour of tripe, making it indigestible and unpalatable.

DON'T BLOCK UP THE WAY.

If you have no liking
For the march of life,
And had rather tarry
Than to join the strife;
If you think the labour
Far exceeds the pay,
Take your choice, but, neighbour,
Don't block up the way.

Let these young men pass you
With their bucklers bright,
Rank and file they may be—
Novices in fight;
But they'll win the battle—
Eager, strong are they;
Hear their armour rattle—
Don't block up the way.

More, yes, more are coming;
Ay, the highways team!
These are early reapers,
See their sickles gleam!
Working while the sun shines,
Little time to play;
Reapers come, and gleaners—
Don't block up the way.

See the veterans marching—
Grey, yet full of fire;
"Action" is the watchword
Passed from sire to sire;
They will ne'er give over
Till they gain the day;
Toward the goal they're tending—
Don't block up the way.

Take the wall, oh, idler—
In the shadows hide;
Never stand a minute
'Gainst the human tide!
Tides must ebb and flow, man,
Currents have full play;
Make room for the workers—
Don't block up the way.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE King of the Sandwich Islands is coming to England on a visit to Captain Lord Charles Beresford, R.N.

A GRACEFUL lady weighing 840 lbs. is about to be imported from New York and exhibited in Piccadilly. She will indeed be a contrast to Lucia Zarate, who only weighs 42 lbs.

A FESTIVAL to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of George Stephenson, the inventor of the railway locomotive, will be held at the Crystal Palace on the 9th of June.

TRIAL is shortly to be made in London of a somewhat novel mode of propelling tram-cars. An endless moving chain is placed in a peculiarly constructed chamber of terra cotta, or some such material, and laid under the roadway. Over the cable, which runs on revolving pulleys in the subterranean chamber, is an open groove some half an inch in width, and through this a pro-

jection from the tram-car above can be easily attached to the chain. The tram thus moves along at the rate at which the chain is rotating. The conductor can attach or detach his car from the chain at will. The motive power for driving the cable will be stationary steam engines.

THE Crown Prince of Sweden has become engaged to the eldest daughter of the Grand Duke of Baden and granddaughter of the German Emperor.

It is not everyone who knows that President Brand, of the Orange Free State, is by descent a colonist of ours. He is the son of Sir Christopher Brand, a former Speaker of the Cape House of Assembly.

THE Mechi Fund exceeds £4,000, and it is desired to make it £5,000 before presentation. The contributors are about 400 in number.

THE custodianship of Her Majesty's gold pantry at Windsor Castle, just rendered vacant by the death of Mr. Goring, is an office of great trust, as may be inferred from the fact that when the Queen entertained the Emperor of Russia, shortly after the marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, gold plate to the value of £2,000,000 is said to have been used. At a rough guess the Royal gold and silver services at Windsor Castle are probably worth about £3,000,000, and include some very precious specimens of art workmanship.

THE French army at the present moment counts 1,002,294 men who have received a complete military education.

In a Chinese encyclopædia the French are dismissed with this mention: "A western people, intelligent and brave, but inclined to thieving."

THE French Government has bought 500 telephones, which are used in rifle and artillery practice.

THE French of New Orleans are a third of the whole population. They almost exclusively occupy all the lower or older part of the city, speak French in their daily intercourse, and have little to do, in trade or society, with the rest of the people.

GREAT buildings of iron and glass like the Crystal Palace present a light and graceful appearance, but the constant expenditure on repairs and maintenance is very heavy. In this way there has been spent on the Palace during the past year more than £11,000.

THE advertisements show that a wonderful change has come over the long lethargic City; new companies are proposed by the dozen, and certainly, without going very profoundly into their merits, they do seem to have considerably more backbone in them than they were wont to have in old speculation times; there is scarcely one which may be called, right off, wild or visionary. In 1879 new schemes to the value of fifty-six millions were brought out; last year the figures rose to one hundred and twenty-two millions; this year that enormous amount bids fair to be doubled if progress is made at the present rate.

A LAD, aged 15, named George Fletcher, employed up to recently as a cash-boy at the shop of Messrs. J. B. and W. Cockayne, drapers, Angel Street, Sheffield, has just succeeded to a legacy of £10,000. The money has been left him by an uncle, Mr. George Fletcher, who was in the leather trade at Wakefield. The testator, who seems to have never taken any notice of his nephew during his life, has also left the lad's mother £1 per week.

THE NEW EMPEROR OF RUSSIA.—The Grand Duke Alexander, who has succeeded to Imperial rule in the Muscovite Empire, was born on March 10, 1845, and is consequently in his 37th year. He is not the first-born son of the late Emperor, the Grand Duke Nicholas, heir-apparent to the throne, born Sept. 20, 1843, having died at Nice, in April, 1865, after a lingering illness. The present Emperor was married in November, 1866, to Maria Dagmar, daughter of the King of Denmark, known since assuming the orthodox Greek faith as Maria Feodorovna, by whom he has four children—Nicholas, the heir-apparent, born May 18, 1868; George, born May 10, 1871; Xenia, born April 18, 1875; and Michael, born Dec. 5, 1878.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OUR CORRESPONDENTS should in all cases furnish us with their names and addresses. Letters signed simply with initials or a nom de plume may not always receive immediate attention, as our space is limited. No charge is made under any circumstances for advertisements appearing on this page.

G. W. C.—We would advise you to let your hair alone, for most hair-dyes have for their base either nitrate of silver or sugar of lead. When used for any length of time the articles named are gradually absorbed into the system, and cause troubles that are difficult to cure. The sugar of lead affects the muscles, and impairs the sight, and produces what is called lead palsy; the nitrate of silver, if used to any great extent, imparts a slate-coloured tinge to the skin, and is frequently the cause of paralysis. Besides this, the hair itself is injured by the use of the dyes.

A. M.—Wills when proved by professional men have the names of such on the back. Copies of all wills proved, births, &c., registered in England and Wales can be seen at Somerset House, London; but each large town contains its own as well, which may be consulted.

MADREPERLE.—Colour of hair light brown.

E. T.—Marriage by registration is legal; three weeks' notice is necessary; the fee is only a few shillings.

ENGINEER.—The growth of the whiskers cannot safely be accelerated by artificial means.

DAINTY.—Apply to the secretary, G. T. F. Abraham, Esq., 91, Dean Street, Soho, W.

H. B.—Cider may be made by collecting apples, rough-tasting ones by preference, allowing them to mellow for some days, grinding them to a pulp, then placing them into coarse strong bags and squeezing out their juice, which after being allowed to remain for a few days in large open tubs is "racked" into casks. For ginger wine boil together for half an hour, say, three gallons and a half of water, twelve pounds of sugar, a quarter of a pound of the best ginger bruised, and the thin rinds of six large lemons. Put the whole warm into a cask with the juice of the lemons and half a pound of nutmeg raisins; add a teaspoonful of thick yeast and stir every day for ten days. Then put in an ounce of isinglass and a pint of brandy, bung close, and subsequently bottle.

A. N. E.—In the process of salting and smoking meat about one-third of its bulk is wasted, consisting of meat juice, water, albumen, and the soluble salts; unless the process is very carefully conducted but little remains save fibre, and under the action of salt and smoke this becomes dry and hard and correspondingly indigestible. Meats pickled in time do not lose materially in bulk, but nearly all their nutritive elements are imparted to the brine, which, of course, is unfit for use. Fat pork is the only meat which is improved by curing, as bacon, since that process increases its digestibility; lean smoked pork or ham is less nutritious than fat bacon, because its hard fibre is very indigestible. Dry-salted fat pork is more digestible than ham, and therefore shows less proportionate waste; it may be prepared as if for bacon, and then dried without smoking. Pickled pork which has become slightly tainted may be restored by boiling and skimming the brine in which it is preserved, and again pouring it scalding hot upon the meat.

R. G. D.—A poet laureate was originally a poet who was crowned with laurel in token of his victory over other poets in competition for a prize. It has been customary for many centuries for monarchs to have poets to write complimentary verses in their honour on birthdays and public occasions. In the latter part of the fourteenth century, Edward III., it is said, appointed Chaucer poet laureate of his court, with a yearly stipend of a hundred marks and a tierce of Malvoisie wine. In the year 1630 the laureateship was made an office in the gift of the lord chamberlain, with a salary of one hundred pounds and a tierce of Canary wine. Ben Jonson was at that time appointed poet laureate. When Southey succeeded to the office, in 1813, the tierce of Canary wine was commuted for twenty-seven pounds. Wordsworth succeeded Southey in 1843, and in 1850 Tennyson succeeded Wordsworth, and is now the poet laureate of England. Southey, as poet laureate, wrote only what he chose; Wordsworth wrote nothing, and Tennyson has written but little, officially.

HARRY D., thirty-one, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

SAMBO, seventeen, tall, good-looking, fond of home and music, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age.

EMILIE, twenty, tall, dark, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about the same age.

OLIVE and MARIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Olive is twenty, short, dark, fond of home and children. Marie is twenty-one, medium height, fair, hazel eyes, of a loving disposition.

SPORTING NED and COUSING HARRY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies between eighteen and twenty with a view to matrimony. Sporting Ned is twenty-one, dark, good-looking, fond of home and children. Cousing Harry is nineteen, dark eyes, good-looking, of a loving disposition.

RED ROSE, DAISY and FORGET-ME-NOT, three friends, would like to correspond with three young gentlemen in the Royal Navy. Red Rose is seventeen, medium height, dark, brown hair, blue eyes, good-looking, fond of dancing. Daisy is eighteen, medium height, light hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing. Forget-me-not is twenty, tall, brown hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of home and children. Respondents must be between twenty-one and twenty-five, tall, dark, good-looking.

WILLIAM, JACK and HARRY, three friends, would like to correspond with three young ladies about seventeen. William is tall, fair hair, blue eyes. Jack is tall, black hair, dark eyes. Harry is medium height, brown hair, hazel eyes.

HOW TO GARNISH THAT HOME OF YOUR OWN.

Look out for that dear little home, girls,
That, almost as sure as the light,
Will welcome you under its roof-tree
Some time, if we reckon aright.
A home of your own, with a loved one
To shelter and guide you through life,
In bright hours of pleasure and gladness,
In seasons of sorrow and strife.

It may not be princely or grand, girls,
A dwelling for mere outside show,
But it lies in your power, begun early,
To make it a heaven below.
Ay! even before you have seen it,
Or him who is destined to be
Your lover, your hero, your husband,
Who may be far over the sea.

Begin with your temper at first, girls,
And this you may try in mere youth—
Of rare household saints, whom we read of,
Take lessons in sweetness and truth.
Be watchful and careful and thrifty—
This latter is woman's behest—
Your dear little fingers keep busy,
And time will take care of the rest.

Look out for that home of your own, girls,
Yet keep yourselves happy and free,
Till wooed by a man of your heart, dears,
Full worthy your consort to be.
Then bring him your love in its freshness,
Your sweetness and truth also bring,
Your house will be then full of blessing,
And sorrow be robbed of its sting.

LUCY, twenty, dark hair, grey eyes, fond of music and dancing, would like to correspond with a seaman in the Royal Navy about the same age.

LILY, sixteen, dark hair, grey eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about eighteen.

VIOLIN and SNOWDROP, two sisters, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen about twenty and twenty-four. Violet is twenty-one, medium height, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing. Snowdrop is eighteen, medium height, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of music and singing.

DINNER PENDANT and SIDE PARTY HARRY, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Dinner Pendant is twenty-one, medium height, fond of home and children. Side Party Harry is twenty-two, medium height, fair, good-looking, fond of music and dancing.

A LONELY ONE, eighteen, medium height, fair, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about twenty-two.

MOSSROSE and BLUEBELL, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Mossrose is nineteen, fair, violet eyes. Bluebell is twenty-one, tall, dark, hazel eyes.

SALLIE and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Sallie is twenty-two, tall, dark. Alice is eighteen, fair, good-looking.

PRINCE, nineteen, medium height, fair, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a tall, dark, young gentleman.

MYRTLE, thirty-two, tall, dark, would like to correspond with a young gentleman.

ANNIE and LOUISE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Annie is nineteen, medium height, brown hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and music. Louise is eighteen, medium height, fair, brown hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

HARRIET and JESSIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two seamen in the Royal Navy. Harriet is twenty-two, medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, fond of home. Jessie is nineteen, good-looking. Respondents must be from twenty-two to twenty-eight.

EMILY and MAGGIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two dark, good-looking young gentlemen. Emily is eighteen, medium height, good-looking, fair. Maggie is eighteen, tall, fair, good-looking.

NELLY and GIPSY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Nelly is tall, fair, of a loving disposition. Gipsy is medium height, dark hair, hazel eyes, fond of singing and dancing.

HARRY and ALICE, brother and sister, would like to correspond with a young lady and gentleman. Harry is sixteen, tall, dark, good-looking. Alice is nineteen, tall, dark.

TOM and HARRY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Harry is twenty, medium height, fair hair, blue eyes.

LOVING BESSIE, a widow, thirty-two, would like to correspond with a young gentleman with a view to matrimony.

AMY, twenty-two, tall, dark, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about twenty-five.

ROSE T., seventeen, brown hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about eighteen or twenty.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

CHARLES is responded to by—Lillie H.

ALICE by—T. C., nineteen, medium height, fair.

SOAPDISH by—Ralpho, nineteen, tall, dark.

H. S. by—Loving Harriet, twenty-six, fair.

DAISY by—Shank Painter.

CONSTANCE by—Cat Head Stopper.

BERTHA by—Marmaduke.

FLORENCE by—Rodger.

J. S. by—J. S., twenty, medium height, dark.

J. P. B. by—Hetty, eighteen, tall, fair.

ALICE by—W. H. B., twenty, medium height, fair.

LYN by—E. W.

MINNOTT TEST by—Celia C., nineteen, tall, fair.

DYNAMITE by—Mina M., medium height.

ELECTRICAL JACK by—Grace D., twenty-one, fair.

BERTHA by—Washington, twenty, tall.

N. B. by—Laughing Elsie, medium height, dark.

ROYAL YARD by—Loving Ruby, tall, dark.

J. S. by—Musical Maud, tall, dark.

D. McC. by—Julia, twenty-two.

HUNSDON by—Britta, twenty-one, dark.

LILLY by—Cook To-day, medium height.

VIOLIN by—Cook To-morrow, tall, fair.

JACK CADE by—Henrietta, nineteen, tall, dark.

CURLY CHING by—Alice, medium height, dark.

ANNIE by—Bob, seventeen, tall.

FELICIA by—Happy Harry, medium height.

KITTY by—Saucy Bertie, medium height, dark.

LENA by—R. G., twenty-eight, tall, dark.

ARTHUR E. by—Laura G., eighteen, tall, dark.

LYN by—Mons. Chose, twenty-two, medium height.

ZILLAN by—D. J. M.

LOVELY LOTTIE by—Lonely Harry.

FELICIA by—W. R. N., twenty-one, tall, fair.

FELICIA by—Sister Block.

HARRIET by—Jim Block.

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